This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

BERKELEY
LIBRARY
ERSITY OF
FORNIA
BIOLOGY
LIBRARY

THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

"At last one alighted within a couple of feet of his very muzzle."

THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE

BY

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "KINGS IN EXILE," "NEIGHBORS UNKNOWN," ETC.

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1925

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1911, by The Cosmopolitan Magazine, The Monthly Magazine Section, The Illustrated Sunday Magazines, The Associated Sunday Magazines, The Metropolitan Magazine, The Christian Herald, and Collier's Weekly.

COPYRIGHT, 1913,
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped. Published February, 1913.
Reissued December, 1925.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

GIFT

QL791
R58
Biology
Library

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE GAUNTLET OF FIRE	1
THE KEEPERS OF THE NEST	29
IN THE YEAR OF NO RABBITS	52
THE INVADERS	71
A DIGGER OF TUBES	95
THE LEADER OF THE RUN	120
WITH HIS BACK TO THE WALL	140
KING OF BEASTS	165
IN THE WORLD OF THE GHOST-LIGHTS	195
THE MOOSE THAT KNOCKED AT THE DOOR	218
PUCK O' THE DUSK	260
A HARASSED HOUSEHOLDER	280
ISHMAEL OF THE HEMLOCKS	302
THE SPOTTED STRANGER	321
THE FEUD	343
RED DANDY AND MACTAVISH	363

714

THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE

The Gauntlet of Fire

IN a way they knew each other pretty well these two, the man and the bear. For nearly two years they had been acknowledged adversaries.

The man had actually seen the bear but once, and then for a swift glimpse only — a flash of shrewd, fierce, inquisitive eyes from a spruce thicket, and a portentous black shadow sinking away noiselessly into the chequered gloom. But he knew well those great tracks — a third as large again as those of the average black bear of Eastern Canada — which drew their menacing trail all about his cabin. He knew those claw-marks on the deep-scarred stretching-trees, where the owner of the claws set his signature almost as high as a grizzly might have set it.

And he had studied sundry massive stumps, only half decayed, which those redoubtable claws had ripped open like punk in the search

for ants and grubs. From all this it was not difficult to infer that he had here a formidable rival for the sovereignty of this wilderness domain which he had just pre-empted — a rival who would probably, by and bye, when the little farm came to be stocked, levy severe tax on his sheep and cattle.

Moreover, he realized that this rival must be clothed in a pelt of special magnificence, which would command a special price in the fur-market. In the intervals of his chopping and clearing, his potato-planting and his sowing of buckwheat, his barn-building and his brush-burning, he went about to set traps for this dangerous antagonist, who, as he rightly inferred, would be too crafty to come within reach of his gun.

The bear, on the other hand, knew the man much better than the man knew him. From the man's first arrival on the banks of the wild South Fork, the great black beast had shadowed him — with some hostility, of course, as a stranger, and a disturber of the solitudes, but more with a keen curiosity. For all his giant bulk, he could move, when he chose, as noiselessly as a mink or a snake. Motionless as one of the ancient stumps left by forgotten

lumbermen, he had watched the flash and the swing of the man's axe, the crashing fall of birch and fir and ash, as the clearing widened and let in the sunlight upon the tangled forest floor.

With wonder he had seen the two powerful red oxen, obedient to the man's sharp word of command, drag the trimmed logs into one place; and then had marked the cabin grow into shape, a surprising shape, beneath the man's skilled hands. At first he had been amazed that the two great oxen should be so subservient, instead of turning upon the man and piercing him with their long horns or trampling him beneath their cleft hoofs.

But soon he had grown to appreciate an inexplicable mastery in the man's voice, in his unconscious indifference to whatever eyes might be watching him from the dark, surrounding coverts. It was plain that the man had no fear. Then, of a certainty he must be very strong. So the bear began to fear, though he could perceive, at first, no cause of fear, except that mysterious something in the man's voice, which seemed to make the oxen obey and toil with grunting patience.

And then, one day after the cabin was built,

when the man was out of sight within, and the heat hummed with gnats and flies all round the sun-steeped clearing, and the red oxen lay in the shade chewing their cud lazily and heaving great windy breaths, he had seen a tall buck wander out from among the trees and stand staring at the cabin.

The man had stepped forth from the cabin door, and raised to his shoulder what looked like a long, brown stick. Instantly a jet of white flame had leapt from the tip of the stick, with a short, biting roar. And the buck, far away at the other side of the clearing, had leapt into the air and fallen forward on his muzzle, dead. A chill had shuddered across the bear's nerves at this sight, and he had sunk back further into the thickets.

No wonder the big, red oxen, for all their savage-looking horns, obeyed this being, who, simply by pointing a little stick and making a sharp noise, could kill from very far off. Thereafter the bear was still more wary in his observation of the terrible intruder, but this dread and hostility only made him the more watchful. Clearly he could not afford to lose sight of the man for any length of time,

lest unguessed and unheard-of things should happen.

In this way it came about that when the man, having got his first seeding and planting over, and his cabin weather-tight, set about the enterprise of trapping the bear, the bear knew something about it. Of all the unseen, inquisitive spectators whose shy, wild eyes watched the work — squirrels, partridge, hares, raccoons, rain-birds, wood-mice, deer, foxes, and owls — the bear was by far the most interested and the most comprehending.

When the first trap — a massive dead-fall — was built, baited, and set, and the man had gone away to leave it free to do its cruel work, the bear had subjected it to a most sagacious scrutiny. Though no one had ever told him how Troy fell, he had been gifted by Nature with that rudimentary sagacity in which the men of Troy seem to have been so unhappily deficient; and he feared the man, even bearing gifts. He smelt the bait — a lump of savoury fat pork — at a discreet distance; and decided to have nothing to do with it. Not for any good purpose, he thought, could such a delicacy be left to the first chance comer.

While he was watching and pondering, hidden in a clump of fir-seedlings whose aromatic fragrance disguised his scent, a bob-tailed wild-cat came prowling by. She saw the glistening white bait, held up to her so temptingly on the prong of the deadfall. Her round, pale eyes gleamed greedily, though her ears flattened in angry apprehension at the strong man-smell of the tracks surrounding it. She was not intelligent, the bob-cat. She knew enough, merely, to know that the delectable morsel belonged to the man. Well, he was nowhere in sight. Even now, she could hear his far-off voice shouting to those stupid oxen. Crouching low, she ran forward with swift stealth, and pounced, with a low growl of exultation, upon the prize. Something seemed to give way. With startled eyes the bear saw those three massive logs, which formed a roof above the bait, come crashing down upon it. With an ear-splitting screech, cut short almost ere it had begun, the unhappy bob-cat was flattened out beneath them.

A red squirrel, which had been watching the whole thing from a near-by branch, burst forth into hysterical chatterings. And a crow, dropping on black wings from the tree-

tops, alighted delicately on one of the logs, and with head cocked knowingly, as if to say "I told you so," peered down with hard, bright eyes at the dead wild-cat. He held that all wild-cats should be dead. It was the only way he liked them. But the manner in which this one's destruction had been brought about struck him as most mysterious.

From that day all the man's possessions seemed to the bear to partake of the nature of traps — to be studied with dreadful interest, but on no account to be touched. So it came about that when, in course of time, the man brought a cow and a calf to the expanding clearing, and a pig, and then sheep, and half a dozen fussy hens, the bear never laid a paw on one of them. His mouth watered over the sheep in particular, but they looked too suspiciously easy. They were surely traps. If he should seize one, the sky, perhaps, would fall upon him and crush him as flat as the wild-cat. The man, instead of appreciating this forbearance, took it as a matter of course, and gave it never a thought. But he grew furious at last at the failure of all his trapping devices, and swore to have the bear's pelt before another winter.

Late that summer came a time of scorching drought. The South Fork stream, a turbulent torrent always, and fed by unfailing spring lakes in the upper barrens, shrank but little. The main Ottanoonsis, however, revealed parched bars and hoary ledges which the oldest woodsmen in three counties had never before seen dry. Many a forest brook vanished altogether, its memory surviving only in chains of still, black water-holes lurking under the giant roots in the cedar and hackmatack swamps. And many a wilderness lake left its lilies to die on a stinking stretch of raw, root-cumbered mud. The man, however, was not greatly troubled, for hardly three hundred yards away, beyond the foot of his clearing, flowed the South Fork, defiant of all droughts. His buckwheat and potatoes were too well advanced to be quite spoiled by lack of rain. And his stock were sure of water.

The South Fork, at this point, and for perhaps half a mile each way above and below the clearing, ran not so wildly but that the man could navigate it in comfort and fish it from his big "dug-out" canoe. Lower down, the rapids became almost impassable for a

distance of some twelve or fifteen miles, till at last the mad stream calmed itself in a low-shored, shallow lake, fringed with blueberry plains.

Under the lifeless air and dry, stagnant heat the forest seemed to gasp heavily, waiting for the rain. Presently, instead of the longed-for clouds, greycool, and fragrant with shower, across the hard blue came a dun-coloured haze, through which the sun took on the look of a disk of hot copper. The balsamy odours of the forest gave way to faint, acrid breaths which made the eyes smart and the nostrils burn. The eagles, hawks, crows, and all strong-flying birds, disappeared. All the four-footed prowlers of the forest coverts grew uneasy, apprehending dangers which they knew not how to combat or to flee from. The great black bear, after sniffing anxiously with muzzle high in air, toward every point of the compass, lost all interest in the man and his works, and took himself whimpering away to a point about five miles downstream, where a deep inlet of dead-water jutted off from the tumbling current of South Fork.

A little later the man, who had been working in a dispirited way among his sickly-

looking potatoes, leaned upon his hoe and eyed the changing sky with apprehension.

"Fire," he muttered, "somewheres round, an' mebbe not far off! Hope there don't blow up no wind!"

Then, throwing down the hoe, he yoked the oxen to the drag, and prepared to haul up two or three barrels of water from the river to the cabin. In case of chance sparks blowing across the clearing, he thought, it might be well to have water on hand.

He went about this task rather listlessly, weighed down by the dead air and by a vague sense of foreboding. But when he halted his slow team by the riverside he saw across the current a sight which shocked him into activity. The oxen saw it, too, and woke up, and began to snort and strain uneasily at the yoke. Beyond the fringe of tree-tops opposite, clouds of smoke were rolling up, with here and there a tongue of red flame flickering along their bases.

The man became a demon of energy. Leaping backwards and forwards with his bucket between the waterside and the barrel on the drag, and shouting furiously to the oxen to stand still, he speedily had the barrel full to

the brim. On the journey back to the cabin, however, he could not hurry. The track was none too smooth, and he had to steady the barrel laboriously lest its precious contents should spill. But the oxen needed no urging, and, after a perspiring struggle with the barrel through the hot and narrow trail, he came out upon the cleared knoll behind the cabin. There he stopped short in consternation.

Beyond the clearing, along the southward horizon, again those ominous clouds uprolling, again those thin, red tongues upleaping viciously and disappearing. From opposite sides the fire was closing in upon him. And only now did he realize the appalling peril. Water-barrels, indeed! With a bitter laugh and a curse at the futility of his efforts, a groan of rage over the ruin of all his hopes, he loosed the oxen from their yoke, and raced with long strides down the slope to set free the rest of the stock. He would give them all a fair chance for their lives, an even chance with his own. Then, snatching up his lean leather wallet and a blanket from his bunk, he raced for the river.

The bear, meanwhile, had reached the little inlet — or "bogan," as the Indians call it —

five miles below. He found it already thronged with silent, trembling refugees. For already, both to north and south, the sky was filled with smoke-clouds which volleyed up in dark, rolling masses, and winged flames were leaping ravenously from tree-top to tree-top.

To eastward the two conflagrations were drawing rapidly together under the draught of a rising east wind. They were converging with monstrous speed upon the river, which just at this point made a turn and went roaring off to south-westward, over a series of broken ledges. The clamour of the rapids was beginning to be dominated by a more awful sound — that of the hissing rush and mutter of the conflagration. Smoke-blasts, pungent and stifling, came belching erratically through the branches and swooping down upon the water, where they thinned and spread, and seemed to be absorbed in the momently discoloured foam. Here and there along the close-drawn skyline a towering, solitary pine-top would burst into flame and flare like a gigantic signal torch. And presently, hurled rocketing through the air as if from unseen explosions, came blazing, sparking brands, starting scout-fires, so to speak, in

advance, or dropping into the water with a harsh and terrifying hiss.

All around the shores of the narrow bogan crowded the beasts, watching with wide, fascinated eyes the flight and fall of these disastrous missiles. Several wild-cats, and one huge grey Canada lynx, crouched at the water's edge, or on out-thrust stumps and branches. As a brand fell near them their ears flattened to their skulls, and they shrank back, spitting wildly. Their ferocious hunting hunger was clean wiped out by fear, and they paid no heed whatever to the shuddering hares, gibbering squirrels, and stoical, indignant woodchucks which crowded about them. Even the bloodthirsty weasels for once forgot to kill, gliding nervously hither and thither among the trembling ranks. A red fox, self-possessed and game in the face of any doom, sat upon his haunches on the tip of a stranded log and eyed the tree-tops, searching in his deep, sagacious mind for some device that might outwit this awful adversary.

The surface of the bogan was alive with swimming mink, musquash, and water-rat, daunted by the catastrophe which was about to overwhelm the world, yet confident in the

power of the cold element they loved to protect them. Standing belly-deep in the water, and from time to time wallowing in it to cool themselves, were a black moose bull with two cows, and half a score of red deer. As for bears, there were none in the strange concourse except the great, black bear himself, he having jealously driven all rivals from his range.

Now, after a brief survey of the situation, the bear waded into the water. He plunged his head beneath the surface to ease the smart of burning eyes and nostrils. At the point where he had entered it, the bogan was shallow, yet with a soft, sticky bottom which was distasteful to his feet. As he stood lifting one foot after the other, uneasily, out of the gathering smoke-pall came whirling down a huge brand, red-hot, and struck a wild-cat crouching on a near-by branch. With a screech the cat bounced into the air, and, finding herself about to fall into the water, which she loathed, squirmed sideways, and succeeded in clutching the bear's capacious back. Her claws sank deep, and, with a growl of pain, he tried to shake her off. Mad with terror, and appearing to regard him as nothing

more than an animated log, she clung and clawed the more tenaciously. At any other time he would have wrenched her from her place and torn her to pieces. But now it never occurred to him to be enraged. The matter was quite impersonal. He only realized that something on his back was hurting him, and he wanted to get rid of it. Throwing himself down, he rolled over in the water, burying the cat in the ooze.

When he got up again his objectionable burden was gone. But he was dissatisfied with his place in the bogan. The water was not deep enough to suit him. And, moreover, he felt like a rat in a corner. He wanted more space, more air, more view, even if there were nothing but horrors for the view to reveal. Shouldering aside a couple of red bucks, who hardly noticed him with their great, soft eyes of terror, he waded out to the entrance of the bogan. Here, where he could feel the pull of the eddy trying to drag him out into the rapids, he took his place in a depth of water that came about his shoulders. An ungainly cow-moose stood close beside him, flapping her big ears despondently, and staring, not at the flames, but at the discoloured

waves and whipped foam racing by. Then past his nose came swimming leisurely a big brown otter. Lifting head and shoulders high above the surface, like a watchful seal, the swimmer surveyed the rapids, and then plunged straight into them, heading fearlessly downstream. He had evidently made up his mind that not much longer would the little bogan serve for a refuge. The bear eyed his departure wistfully, and pondered it, but had no heart to dare the lashed waves and roaring ledges.

But by this time the roar of the ledges was unheard for the wide, ravening tumult of the flames. As they leapt and swooped they almost seemed to scream, and it was as if the smoke-clouds themselves found voice and thundered. The heat grew suffocating, intolerable; and sparks and brands fell so thick about the bogan that some of the beasts, with fur suddenly shrivelling, went mad and raced off into the furnace, while others simply toppled into the water and were drowned forthwith. The beasts who knew the water sank themselves as deeply into it as they could, and shudderingly awaited their doom, but the wise fox, swimming cautiously around

the edges of the bogan and investigating it, found at last a hollow under the bank, with drenched roots screening the entrance. This admirable little retreat was already packed with muskrats and a few mink, but he crowded himself in without ceremony, thrusting others out to shift for themselves. And as the dim annals of his race record that he lived to hunt hare and partridge, in later years, about the scarred stumps of the man's abandoned clearing, it is evident that the retreat proved a safe one.

The bear, meanwhile, as the fiery doom closed in upon him, began to tremble. Except for the wise fox, he was the only beast in all that wretched company with intelligence enough to think and to realize the full horrors of their fate. There was no hole under the bank big enough to shelter his huge bulk. He whimpered miserably, and turned his eyes with longing down the wild channel by which the other had fled. But he could not dare the path. It seemed an equally sure destruction. And already it was but a seething, darkened avenue of violence between two walls of smoke and flame.

And the bogan too, was now a place of

horrors. Its surface was covered with the survivors of the smaller beasts, a wild-cat or two, innumerable squirrels, with weasels, martens, woodchucks, mice, raccoons, and even a few hares whom the hour of supreme despair had taught to swim. The rest were dead. Several of the deer, too, had gone under, in the bedlam struggle that now milled blindly in the centre of the pool. Besides the bear, only the sombre and stoic moose held themselves aloof from that fatal vortex, lying down in the water, and lifting their muzzles from time to time to draw a scorching and suffocating breath.

Suddenly, chancing to turn his despairing eyes upstream, the bear saw a wild shape dashing downward towards him through the spray and smoke. In another moment he recognized it. It was the man, crouched low in the stern of his log canoe, and steering it, with frantic paddle, between the rocks and leaping surges. He had a blanket partly twisted about his head; and one corner of it, streaming out behind him, smoked and smouldered. He headed the canoe into the bogan, and just saved himself from upsetting as he ran slantingly against the submerged

back of one of the moose. He came to a stop within arm's-length of the bear, and the latter saw that he was curiously changed in appearance. His great, sinewy hands and gaunt face were blackened and drawn, and his eyes stared terribly from sockets whence eyebrows and lashes had been scorched away. Nevertheless, to the bear his coming brought a sense of security. Here, he felt, was a master spirit, such as even the monsters of the fire would not overcome. He whined and drew nearer to the canoe, a dim hope rising in his heart. The man noticed him, and even in that moment of desperation recognized him, with distorted grin, as the antagonist who had so long eluded his snares.

"The both of us has got it in the neck this time, old pard, I reckon!" he muttered thickly, snatching off the blanket and hurriedly sopping it over the side of the canoe. Then, swinging it once more, all dripping, about his shoulders and over his head, and gripping a corner of it between his teeth to enable him to breathe through it in the thick of the smoke, he thrust forth again into the current and went dashing down the rapids, under the low-rolling smoke-pall. For an instant the

bear hesitated, whimpering like a puppy, and then plunged after him.

As a matter of fact, the bear was a much better swimmer than he had guessed himself to be. After a few moments of bewilderment in the terrific, corkscrewing clutch and pull of the current, he found himself able to keep his head generally above water, and then to more or less choose his course.

At first he chose it badly, misreading the signs of the water. After having buffeted his breathless way through a series of mad "rips," he saw ahead of him, a little to the right, what seemed a smooth passage through a barrier of breakers. Resolutely he struggled towards it as he swept down the channel. He gained it. His foot dragged bottom. He clawed frantically to check himself, but he was rolled clean over, and shot from the lip of a perpendicular ledge into the churning cauldron below.

Fortunately for him, the cauldron was deep enough to break the direct thrust of the torrent, and he was held in a sort of eddy till his wits and his wind came back to him. Then he made his escape at the side, and was swept on down the raging current. But now

he knew enough to avoid such spots of treacherous smoothness, and to choose in preference the steep, turbulent, heavily surging channels which indicate depth and a clear way.

The man, urged on by his powerful paddle, was now far ahead, and out of sight, but the bear felt confidence in following where he had led the way. Both shores of the river were now a raging furnace, a chaos of belching black smoke-bursts torn apart by sheets of red and orange flame. Tall trunks blazed for a few minutes above the tumult, then toppled and fell, the crash of their fall unheard in the universal raving. The bear at times felt his very lips and nostrils wither in the heat, as he lifted his dripping head and snatched painful breaths. But he was no longer despairing, such confidence had he in the man's leadership.

At length the main current of the South Fork gathered itself into an appalling trough and shot downward with a thunder that even made itself heard amid the rage of the flames. The bear struggled to gain the broken shallows along shore, but he was too late. The current gripped him implacably. A moment more, and he was in the sluice. Irresistible cross-

currents seized him, rolled him over, sucked him under. Dull noises boomed in his ears, and his lungs were near bursting. Then all at once he was thrust up into the air again, strangling, and felt smooth rocks slipping by under his feet. The next moment his claws caught wood, and clung like a vice, and held. A second or two more and he was drawing himself clear of the torrent, and holding with all his force to some logs which had been driven and jammed into the jaws of a side ledge. Right before his nose, to his amazement, was clinging the man, his body under water, in a crevice of the rocks, and his head, all but the eyes, swathed in the dripping blanket. The canoe was nowhere to be seen.

The man looked at the bedraggled and gasping beast with bleared eyes of recognition, and moved further along the logs to make room for him.

"Glad to see you, pardner!" he cried. "Make yourself right to home! You an' me's the sole survivors hereabouts, I guess!"

Either catching a faint sound of the man's words, or troubled by the man's eyes meeting his, the bear shrank back diffidently. But, when he felt again the current clutching at

his hindquarters, he once more came forward and crouched low in the backwash within reach of the man's arm.

For the moment both refugees were safe. They had water enough to cover them, and certain ridges of rock rising above the surface protected their faces from the direct force of the occasional devastating blasts of flame which licked out across the water. There was nothing to do but wait.

All that day, and all night (though when day passed into night they did not know) the man and the beast lay thus side by side, holding on to life, while the fire raged by, on either side and over them. Then it began to die down, leaving red stumps and trunks to smoke and smoulder up and down the shores, with here and there a lonely spruce still flaring. The air was now cool enough to breathe without discomfort; and a desolate grey dawn looked down upon the scene of ruin.

The man got up, stretched his numb legs, squeezed the water from his clothes; and now, so quickly do our wants change, turned his body to warm itself at the nearest glow. The bear watched him anxiously, but ventured

no nearer. He hung on to the man's movements as a dog might have done. He had lost, for the moment, all his initiative.

There was one thing that the man now saw clearly: there could be no escape to that fiery shore perhaps for several days, unless a deluge of rain should come to quench the glowing moss-beds. But between his precarious refuge and the shore, a little way downstream, he marked a spit of sand and gravel, with a few logs stranded upon it, and a sparse growth of low sandplum and osier. It lay so in the path of the driven spray from the ledges that, though the heat had blasted and shrivelled the bushes, it had not been able to burn them, or to do more then sear the logs with eating flame along their seams of balsam. To the man's eye this log-strewn gravel-spit seemed to offer a chance of escape if only he could reach it. But between raced a deep and turbulent current, which, strong swimmer though he was, he feared would whirl him away like a straw. If only the bear would try it first, he thought! Though on second thought he realized that that could tell him little in any case, the bear being able to master a tide

in which he would go under like a kitten. He looked at the bear appealingly, however, and shouted above the tumult of the rapids —

"Try it, pard! We can't hang out here all day!"

The bear thought he was being accused of some enormity, and shrank nervously to the lower edge of the refuge.

Seeing that there was nothing to do but put his fate to the test, the man wasted no more time. He knew he should gain neither strength nor resolution by waiting. Carefully keeping to the crest of the ridge between the two channels, he pushed his way upward against the divided and weakened current, in order to gain all the advantage possible for his perilous venture. When he could no longer resist the thrust of the current, he threw himself as far out into it as he could, and swam desperately, hoping against hope to gain enough to bring him within reach of the gravel-spit before being swept past it. In the next instant, however, he realized the futility of his hope. In that current he was no more than a whirled leaf.

The bear, meanwhile, had been watching

his movements eagerly as he worked his way upstream. He had no idea what the manœuvre meant, but he knew very well that the man could not leave their refuge by that route. When, however, he saw the man throw himself clear out into the channel, heading toward shore, he felt himself being deserted. With a whining cry, he, too, sprang out into the torrent. He dared not let the man out of his sight, lest the fire should come again to swoop at him.

In the grip of that sluicing flood he battled magnificently, holding his muzzle high; and though he was carried downward at frightful speed, he nevertheless succeeded in making some progress diagonally. He had just about got the measure of the forces against him, and shaped such a course as would enable him to fetch the sandspit, when the man, to his astonishment, was swept down upon him, and grabbed him by the long fur of his haunches. Startled by this unexpected assault, he struck out more energetically than ever. And the man, swinging around behind him, shifted to his lower flank, and hung on inexorably.

In his alarm the bear gained the gravel

by a handsome margin, and scurried out upon it like a frightened cat. But that terrifying clutch was no longer on his flank. As he turned to see what had happened, the man stood, laughing breathlessly, at the edge of the gravel, and shouting —

"Thanks, pardner! You done noble!"

Much disconcerted at the laughter, which was something quite beyond his comprehension, the bear slunk off to the further side of the sandspit, and eyed wistfully the smouldering shores.

The man, having regained his breath, now proceeded to roll two of the logs together, side by side, in the quiet water at the tail of the sandspit. With the stringy roots of the sandplums and the little shoots of the scorched osiers, he lashed the two logs securely together, and then again yet more securely, till he had a raft that he thought would hold together in any rapid yet to be encountered. He knew that he was now not half a mile from the lake and the open barrens; and he knew, too, that all the worst ledges and chutes of the South Fork were past. He had neither paddle nor pole to guide his course, but he pushed off confi-

dently. As he did so he waved farewell to his fellow-refugee.

"Ye'd better sit tight now, pardner!" he shouted. "Ye're all right where y'are till the woods get a mite cooled down."

The bear, no longer daunted by the menace of the flames, but still nervous of that masterful clutch upon his flanks, appeared to accept the advice as final. At first he followed the raft to the edge of deep water, whining irresolutely. Then he sat down on his haunches, and watched it go ploughing and wallowing through the waves, with the man crouched upon it, till it vanished in a bend of the stream.

The Keepers of the Nest

UP from the south, and from the blue, palm-fringed lagoons, the giant white flock came beating, on wings that drove them through the heights of air at something like a mile and a half a minute. Over the rank, bright, mysterious solitudes and gold-green reek of the Everglades the shining wedge of their flight cleft the air unswervingly. In the mighty, throbbing rhythm of that flight, each vast white wing flashed momently like snow against the intense blue, struck by the level rays of a sun not yet an hour above the horizon.

In that high-voyaging flight went fifteen swans, those huge white, clarion-voiced birds so inaptly known as the "whistling swans." They flew in strict array, with usually four in the shorter limb of the wedge, and eleven in the longer one, the wisest and most dominant of the flock, the undisputed leader, flying

at the apex. The first far summons of the northern spring had come to him suddenly, in the blue and gold of the Floridian lagoons, and though he knew that spring was still deep wrapped in ice, howled over by the savage Arctic winds, he had lingered but a day or two before following the call. For a day or two the flock had been greatly excited, swimming this way and that, preening their feathers nervously, and making the yellow shores re-echo with their harshly sonorous cries. It was not an easy matter to tear themselves away from those milk-warm, teeming, green-azure tides; but at length, in the cool of the dawn, a flock of wild geese had gone musically *honking* overhead, bound for Hudson Bay. This was just the spur that he was needing. As if he had merely been waiting for these, his forerunners, to lead the way, he sprang into the air, with a long trumpeting call and a mighty beating of wings. The flock rose after him, in a snowy, tempestuous confusion of wings and cries. With much jealous wrangling the wedge formed itself as it rose, pounding upwards on a long slant, till at last, having gained a cloudy height, it swept northward on the trail of the geese.

Not far under five feet in length, and with an enormous wing area, these "whistling swans" were the stateliest birds that the North American continent could boast. The whiteness of their plumage, radiantly flawless, save for a spot of yellow on each side of the face, was set off in a formal fashion by jet-black legs and bill. Their full-arched skulls betrayed a high degree of intelligence, and their wild eyes held a sort of aloof defiance.

Swerving rapidly inland, as if to avoid the Atlantic coast, the swans swept toward the Mississippi Valley. From time to time, with tremendous splashings and a noise as of a band of horns and bugles, they would come down from their heights to rest and feed, seeking always, for their halt, the loneliest of lakes or marshy pools. The weight of their great frames, and the fierce energy expended in the terrific speed of their flight, forced them to feed well and often.

From the altitude at which they journeyed the swans looked down on all the other migrant hosts, with the exception, perhaps, of the geese, who flew at about the same level. Above them, in the intense blue, they saw only a majestically wheeling eagle now and

then, or the black, motionless wings of a soaring vulture, or some high-hawking falcon waiting to swoop upon her prey. But of none of these had the swans any fear. The harmless black vultures would not molest a kitten. And neither the eagle nor the swift gerfalcon, or goshawk, most bloodthirsty of his race, would lightly risk a buffet that might hurl him reeling to the earth. The swans, indeed, gave small thought to any possible enemies in their aërial path.

Yet, but for their confidence in their own power and courage, even the giant white swans might have had misgivings as the goshawk came gliding, a beautiful and sinister form, above the line of their flight. Flying as they were at a rate of not much less than a hundred miles an hour, the measured beat of their wings was a visible manifestation of splendid and adequate effort. But the goshawk swiftly overtook them, almost without seeming to hasten the slow sweep of his long, scythe-like pinions. Directly above the leader his wings came to a stop, and he glided motionless, with the wind of his speed hissing in the stiff-set feathers, and his flat, cruel head reaching downward as if he were about

to strike. The longer limb of the wedge shortened a little, as certain of the younger birds at the rear nervously drew in closer to their fellows. But the leader and the other older birds paid no attention to the menace, beyond turning upwards, as they flew, a steady and watchful gaze. A few moments later, and apparently without an effort, the splendid marauder sailed on ahead. Two minutes more, and he had overtaken the journeying geese. Pouncing upon the hindermost, he gripped its outstretched neck with his clutching talons and fairly tore out its throat. But it was too heavy a bird for him to bear up, so, after a moment or two of tremendous flapping, he let it drop. It fell, sprawlingly, turning over several times in the air before it landed with a crash in the top of a dense old cedar. The great hawk, with half-folded wings, dropped after it straight as a stone and caught it again securely in his talons just as it touched the branches. With heavy flappings he guided it to a perch where he could devour it in comfort; and the swans, as they beat their way above the scene, stared down upon it with eyes of grave indifference.

Soon passing beyond the zones of cane-field, pine barren, and cypress swamp, they crossed the harsh and forbidding ridges of the Tennessee Mountains, running the gauntlet of the rifles of the wild mountaineers. In this perilous passage they lost three of their flock; but their leader swept them on without allowing the array to become demoralized. For a few seconds only was there some confusion, as a strong bird near the head of the wedge, having got his death wound, struggled blindly to keep on. A moment more, however, and he went plunging downward; and the line closed up.

And now the skies they traversed were no longer of so palpitating a blue, but more often of a sullen grey or lowering with black and wind-rent clouds. Gusts of icy rain burst over them, and those wanton storms which strive to buffet back the vanguards of the diffident northern spring. The rivers that now rolled swirling beneath them were cold and swollen floods, heavy with silt. The broad plains that stretched to the horizon and beyond began to be mottled uncouthly with patches of grey and shrinking snow. Soon the brown disappeared, and all was snow,

white and interminable, broken only by the blue-black watercourses rolling along their burden of logs and ice, or by dark green, ragged belts of spruce forest. Such scattered cities as passed beneath them they hardly heeded, unless it chanced to be at night, and the city one of importance. Then the wide-flung glare always drew them, and there would be, on the part of the younger birds, a tendency to descend and investigate; but the leader always checked this inexorably, and swung the flock sometimes to a higher level.

Voyaging thus day by day toward ever more and more inhospitable lands and skies, they came at last to those shelterless and incredibly bleak expanses of the Barren Grounds which stretch along the north-west shores of Hudson Bay. In a blinding smother of snow they arrived at a small lake, a few miles inland from the sea, which had been the leader's objective ever since leaving the sun-drenched Floridian lagoons. But he had too far outflown the advance of the sluggish spring, and the little lake was not yet open. After circling above it with loud, disappointed cries, they flew off down the course of the shallow, turbulent stream which came boiling from

under the ice, and alighted amid the muddy and wave-eaten floes which fringed the shores of the bay.

For nearly three weeks the flock held together and kept to the tide-waters. Their refuge was a narrow and shallow bay, its beaches piled with ice-cakes which gave them some shelter from the tearing winds. Here food was abundant, so they were well enough off, though restless and anxious to get about their nesting.

As the wind was off shore, under the lee of the ridged ice-cakes the water was comparatively still. And it was here they slept, rocking softly on the backwash. Here, for the most part, they were safe from all enemies. But one night, as they slept, shadowy, pale shapes on the dimly-shadowed water, there came another pallid shape, moving noiselessly as a smoke, down to the water's edge, and paused among the huddled ice-cakes. Motionless it eyed the sleeping swans. Then, warily withdrawing, it entered the water some fifty yards away, swam out perhaps another fifty yards, and approached the sleepers from the direction of the open sea, the direction from which they least apprehended attack. Swim-

ming so deep in the water that only a sharp, black muzzle appeared above the surface, the prowling shape came suddenly and without warning above the swans. Rearing half its length above the surface, it seized one of the sleepers by the neck and killed it with a single savage shake.

Wide awake on the instant, the flock beat up into the air with wild buglings of consternation, as the great white bear went splashing shoreward with his prize. The flock flew out to sea, mounting to a great height, and circled for nearly an hour in the glimmering twilight before they could recover their composure. Then they came dropping back in silence, every eye alert, and settled once more upon the water a couple of hundred yards from their old sleeping-place. For perhaps another half-hour they floated with heads all erect, searching every ice-cake, every little lapping wave-crest. And thereafter, so long as the flock remained together, when they slept it was always with a sleepless sentinel on guard.

It was nearly a week later when there came a change — a change so sudden that all the forces of the cold were routed in a night.

The spring, so long held back, came with a soft, delicious rush. No more shrieking of winds and roar of waves along the outer ledges, but, instead, bland airs that breathed of soaking moss, and wide, still waters gleaming under a desolate but tranquil sky. Through long, unclouded days the sun poured down lavishly, the snow fled like a lifting mist, and the ice, collapsing with silvery crash and tinkle, fell back into the floods that gave it birth. A wave of green, high, thin, ineffably tender, went washing in a day all across the illimitable wastes of the muskeg. Another day, and the green was starred with flowers.

The flock had scattered at once, flying off in pairs to their secluded nesting-places. The leader and his mate had no great way to go, for their place was already chosen. For several years they had held a tiny islet in the near-by lake, whose shores were a morass which gave them protection from most enemies. Their nest, of course, was invariably swept out of existence by the winter hurricanes, but they had no objection to the task of nest-building.

The islet was no more than a handful of moss and willow scrub caught in a jumble of

uptilted rock, and it rose but a foot or so above the lake level. The two swans, working together — the splendid male as diligent in the task as his mate — collected dead sticks and brushwood from all around the shores of the lake, dragging it out with their powerful bills from where the storms had driven it into the tangle of the muskeg. They wove its foundations solidly, and reared it to a height of something over two feet, that its precious contents might be safe from any floods.

Almost before the nest was fairly finished, the female began to lay, the ample cup of the nest becoming lined with down as she went on laying. The eggs were big, obscurely-tinted affairs, a good twelve inches in the greater circumference, and with a dull, suède-like surface. She laid the full complement of her kind, which is six, and then began to sit.

In this long and arduous labour the male took no part. But this was not from any lack of sympathy on his part. He was ceaselessly on guard, and devoted in his attentions to his utterly preoccupied mate; and never did he allow his foraging expeditions to lead him any distance from the nest. When his mate came off to feed, he stayed close beside

the nest, watching over the eggs. And if any inquisitive saddleback or herring gull flew over, peering down greedily at the coveted spheres in the nest, he would lift his wings threateningly and warn them off with a furious and strident hissing.

For a week or two, however, this assiduous guardianship put no great tax on anything but his patience. There was no serious danger in sight. A pair of the great white and grey Arctic hawk-owls, almost as big as eagles and far more savage, were nesting off on the muskeg, perhaps half a mile away. But these fierce marauders were not interested, for the present, in the nest of the swans. They had not the gulls' taste for eggs, and only the direst hunger could have driven them to try conclusions with the mighty wings and bills of the keepers of the nest on the islet. When the young cygnets should come to be hatched out, then might they begin to take an interest in the swans' nest; but for the present they never came near enough even to elicit a warning from the vigilant guardian.

Besides the hawk-owls, out there on the muskeg were stoats and ermine, a few mink, plenty of the little blue Arctic foxes, and a

few of the larger and far more dangerous red species. But none of these could get to the nest except by swimming, and the swans knew that not one of these prowlers, unless, perhaps, a very daring red fox, would care to approach the islet as long as either one of its keepers was by. There were no wolves to fear, for they not only hated the half-floating edges of the lake, but they had followed the trail of the wandering caribou to some far-distant ranges. To be sure, there was the great grey lynx, seen picking his way stealthily, from time to time, about the drier portions of the muskeg, and sometimes stopping to glare hungrily across the water at the stately white guardian of the nest. But the swans knew that at this time of year — the season of good hunting — even the lynx was not ravenous enough to wet his well-kept fur by swimming out to the islet.

But one day there came gliding over the muskeg, pausing and lurking behind the low bushes, a beautiful, dark-brown, sinister-looking stranger. He was long and low in the body, sinuous as a snake, and with a cruel, pointed head. He made his way down to the edge of the water, and stood looking

steadily across at the brooding mother on her nest.

The watchful sentinel had never before seen a fisher, but he knew at once that this was an enemy, and a dangerous one. Spreading his vast wings, lowering and extending his long neck on a level with the ground, and hissing like an escape-pipe, he stalked around till he had put himself between his mate and those deadly eyes. At the edge of the water he stood poised, a splendid, gleaming, snowy figure; and for several seconds the two so strangely-matched antagonists surveyed each other across some twenty yards of clear water.

The fisher was not just then particularly hungry, but he was, as usual, in the mood for killing. His pause was not because of any hesitation, but simply because he had never seen a swan before, and, like the cunning tactician that he was, he took count of his opponent's points before attacking. Presently he slipped noiselessly into the water and came swimming at great speed toward the islet.

Ordinarily, perhaps, the swan would have chosen to await the attack on his own threshold. But some swift insight warned him now to join battle in that element where he

was most at home. He launched himself smoothly as oil, and his powerful webs drove him gliding over the surface, apparently without effort, at a pace far beyond that of the fisher. But he did not sail direct to meet the foe. Rather it looked to the foe as if he were going to shun the encounter. He swept off on a curve, as if doubtful what to do in such an emergency.

The fisher was almost abreast of him, when he swerved like lightning, and, fairly lifting himself from the water, hurled himself straight at the swimmer's head. The swimmer dived; but, taken by surprise as he was, he was not quick enough to escape a bewildering blow over the right eye from the bird's powerful bill. Blinded for the moment on that side, he was at the same time filled with a very madness of rage. That any mere thing in feathers should dare to withstand him was unbelievable. He rose to the surface again instantly, shooting half his length out of water, and snapping viciously with his long white fangs. But he rose into an incomprehensible turmoil of enormous, battering wings, and lashed foam, and unheard-of hissings, and blinding, rigid white feathers; and it was nothing but a few

feathers that his deadly jaws succeeded in grasping. Baffled and choking, he fell back with his mouthful of feathers; and as he dived once more, with a view to coming up again at some more convenient and satisfactory point of attack — at, perhaps, a foot below the surface — the back of his neck was clutched by a pair of steel-like mandibles. The swan had darted his long, snaky neck under water, as if to fish for lily roots; and now, having secured a good grip, he was shaking his enemy as a terrier would shake an old shoe. His neck and bill were excellently fitted to this employment, for lily roots are tough and require a lot of energetic persuasion.

On land, of course, those tactics would have proved promptly fatal to the bird. The fisher, with his lithe strength and swiftness, would have writhed about and fixed his teeth in his adversary's throat, and the fight would have been over. But here, in the water, he could get no leverage whereon to exert his strength. He could do nothing but kick and twist in futile fury. Moreover, not being accustomed to exerting himself under water, he involuntarily opened his mouth, and speedily felt himself choking. In fact, had the

swan but understood the magnitude of his present advantage, he might now have drowned his assailant without further trouble, and rid the wilderness of one of its bloodiest scourges. But the indignant bird, having himself no objection to keeping his head under water several minutes at a time, little guessed that such an experience might be fatal to his enemy. He presently relaxed his terrible grip, and, backing off lightly, waited to greet the foe's reappearance at the surface with a fresh buffeting of those great wing-elbows in which he put his faith.

Ordinarily speaking, the fisher is the last to cry quits or to lose heart under any punishment. But this kind of punishment was something so mysterious, so undreamed of, that it seemed for the moment to change his whole nature. It is more than probable that a good submersion would cool the battle lust even of a rhinoceros. It certainly cooled the fisher's. Though his lungs were bursting and his brain saw sparks, the moment he was freed from that grip on his neck, he had the presence of mind to remain yet a few seconds more under water, while he swam desperately toward his own shore. When at last he was

forced to lift his head above the surface, he was within a few feet of the fringing bushes. But his adversary was there. He was met, as before, by a stupefying whirlwind of wings and blows and terrific sounds. Gulping a fresh lungful of the air he was agonizing for, he dived again, this time as deep as he could, escaping by a miracle a second darting clutch of his vanquisher's bill. Not till he was actually within the screening roots and stems did he come up again, and then it was to worm his way through them unseen till he was a good twenty paces or so from the water's edge. Then he slunk off without pausing to digest the situation — the most dispirited fisher that ever roamed the muskeg. The swan, catching a glimpse of his flight, filled the solitudes with the sonorous trumpetings of his triumph, and swam proudly back to the nest.

As the long five weeks of brooding, for the patient mother on her nest, drew near an end, there came to the Barren Grounds a time of unprecedented drought. The innumerable streams that drained the soaking muskeg ran shallow as they had never run before within the memory of the long-lived swans. Under the long, unshadowed warmth the lake shrank

amazingly; and at last, to the vexation of the keepers of the nest, their islet ceased to be perfectly an islet. The group of tilted strata which formed it rose so far out of water that a thin-topped ledge was revealed, connecting them with the shore. It was no more than a series of widely-separated and precarious stepping-stones, awash in the smallest ripples, but it was enough to allow a sufficiently nimble wanderer to visit the islet dry-shod. The swans eyed it with growing disquiet.

At last came the day when the patient brooder heard stirrings, and tappings, and thin little cries coming from the six precious eggs beneath her breast. From time to time she would lower her head among them to listen enraptured, or to answer with soft sounds of encouragement in her throat. Her mate drew close to the nest, forgetting to eat, but never forgetting to keep a fiercely watchful eye upon the ledge connecting with the shore.

Soon one of the baby cygnets, having divided the shell into two halves by the ordered strokes of his sharp-tipped bill, thrust up the top portion as if it had been a lid, and sprawled forth all wet against its mother's hot and naked breast. The mother pushed one half

of the shell within the other, that they might take up less room, and then, a little later, threw them out of the nest, lest they should get fitted on over the end of another egg and smother the occupant.

Presently two more eggs hatched almost simultaneously. The ecstatic mother was now half standing in the nest to give the damp sprawlers room. It was at this time that the old grey lynx, prowling down nearer to the water's edge than was his wont, observed the stepping-stones and decided to come over. He had wanted those great white birds for a long time.

Now, the most powerful of swans, under usual circumstances and conditions, is no match for the lynx, but a helpless quarry merely for that fierce and powerful marauder. But often, in defence of their young, the wild creatures develop powers and heroisms undreamed of at other times. At such a period they become utterly reckless of odds; and such a temper may often accomplish the impossible. Moreover, it is one thing to hold a bridge, and another to fight in the open.

There was no uncertainty in the minds of the two swans as to the deadliness of this peril.

They knew all about lynxes. The mother bird stood up among her eggs and young, and stepped delicately from the nest, hissing and beating her wings. Both birds knew better than to attack this foe by water or by land. With screams of hate they rose laboriously into the air.

The lynx had reached the second stepping-stone, a sharp and narrow one, and was balancing himself with the caution of a house cat afraid of wetting her feet, before taking the next leap. Just as he gathered himself to spring, the male swan struck him heavily on the side of the head, almost throwing him from his foothold. His fore-paws, indeed, and his whiskered muzzle went into the water, but his great hind claws, firm based for the spring, maintained their hold on the rock. Spitting harshly in his amazement, he clawed back to his position. But in the next instant he was so ill-advised and over-confident as to rise upon his hind legs, striking at his assailant in the hope of bringing him down. At the very moment when his balance was least secure, the female, utterly reckless, launched her whole buffeting weight against him. Hurling him irresistibly from the ledge, she

fell with him and upon him, driving him deep into the water.

For one bewildering second he clawed at her, ripping off the strong white feathers, and inflicting cruel wounds on breast and thigh. But this was for a moment only. Daunted and choking, he loosed his grip in haste and pawed his way back to the surface. As he scrambled out upon the ledge, both birds were at him again instantly; but he had not an ounce of fight left in him. He was not at all hungry, and he did not like swans, and he wanted to get off to some quiet, sunny place and dry himself. Spitting loudly, head hunched down between his shoulders, ears flat, and stub of a tail pressed tight between his furry buttocks, he fled ignominiously through a pandemonium of wings and beaks and screams. When he was quite beyond their reach, the two swans stretched themselves to their full height, spread their wings as wide as possible, and trumpeted a raucous warning to all trespassers. Then they hurried back to the nest which they knew so well how to guard. The female, apparently unconscious of her wounds, resumed eagerly her brooding, with soft murmurs to the hatching

young; while the male, as calm as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, or was ever likely to happen, set himself to preening the ruffled snow of his plumage.

In the Year of no Rabbits

IT was the hungry year — for all the flesh-eating kindreds of the northern wilds a year of ceaseless ambush, of strained vigilance, of unprecedentedly savage feud. In this year every truce was broken.

For it was the year of no rabbits. As happens once in a while, mysteriously, the swarming hordes of them had vanished as if wiped out by a pestilence or exiled in a mass, inexorably, by some caprice of the unseen Powers. And so red anarchy in the wild. For the rabbit is your great reconciler, your great keeper of the peace. It is he that keeps life more or less regulated for the fiercely individual and ungovernable hunters and prowlers. For to his inexhaustible fertility, and to the food supply afforded by his myriads, are all their lives attuned. Their wants satisfied by this facile chase, they can afford to save themselves trouble by avoid-

ing each other at times, by respecting, to a certain extent, each other's ranges, and so escaping the risk of dangerous and doubtful encounters. Few of the wild creatures — with the exception of certain males in the mating season — care to fight for fighting's sake, or to join battle, unless in defence of their young, with an antagonist of anything like equal powers. A victory too costly is almost as bad for them as a defeat, for it leaves them weakened, so that they fall a prey to the next foe that chances along.

Under these circumstances, it is not strange that there should be signs, among the greater beasts, of something like a truce where their helpless young are concerned. It is no matter of good will, by any means, but of common prudence merely. For when their young are threatened, even the weak are dangerous, and the strong become implacable in their vengeance. In general, therefore, among equals, the raiding of nurseries is not regarded as good hunting; the peril is too great for the profit.

But when the rabbits were gone, all that was changed. Then any hunting was good hunting.

It is hard to realize that little, palpitating,

bulging-eyed bunny could exert so vast an influence on the economy of the wilderness. But there was none so strong or so haughty as to rest indifferent to his going. Even man himself was touched; for the foxes and the wild-cats drew in about the settlements and harried the hen-roosts and the pastures of the outlying farms. The great herb-eaters — the red deer, the caribou, and the gigantic moose himself — were not exempt from the sudden anarchy; for the moose and the caribou had to guard their young with a vigilance hitherto undreamed of, and the weaker deer soon discovered that enemies whom he had been wont to despise had all at once grown formidable.

Of all the wilderness dwellers, the bears, perhaps, were least affected. They had never taken more than a chance interest in quarry so elusive as the nimble rabbit, and flesh food was never essential to them so long as roots and fruits and fungi, grubs and beetles, ants and honey, were to be found in the forest. And when the craving for flesh was not to be denied, it was big game they hunted — deer, or sheep, or some strayed heifer. But, for all their independence, the bears were forced to

take account of the departure of Master Rabbit. They grew afraid to go far from their dens, lest in their absence some greatly daring lynx or fox or fisher should slip in and kill their cubs.

It was, perhaps, the lynxes, on the other hand, who suffered most. They and the weasels were the most assiduous hunters of the rabbit, and they lacked the weasels' adaptability. They are set in their ways, the lynxes; and though more savage and vastly more formidable than their smaller cousins, the wild-cats, they are at the same time far shyer of man and all his works. Instead of following the foxes and wild-cats into the fringes of the settlements, they stayed where they were, and went hungry or hunted dangerous game.

Near the top of a steep and rocky knoll, at the heart of a cedar swamp, a wise old mother lynx had her lair. The knoll was an upthrust of broken strata, a tangle of cleft rocks and stunted birch and hemlock, and in a narrow-mouthed cave, near the summit, was the lair. Here the savage mother felt that her litter was pretty well hidden. All approaches to the den were narrow and diffi-

cult, and it would be a bold enemy indeed who would dare the perilous entrance unless very sure of getting clear away before the mother's return. She ventured, therefore, as few mothers in that calamitous season could venture, to allow herself some freedom of range. And this was well. For they were lusty and hungry youngsters, those striped, velvety kittens, whose baby whimperings had already something harsh and fierce in them, though they still sprawled blindly in their nest; and to keep her breasts supplied with milk for their precious demands she had to have good hunting.

Unlike some more fortunate mothers of the wild, she had to care for her family alone. To her ferocious mate she dared not let their hiding-place be known, lest, in some unnatural moment, he should make a meal of them. Ordinarily, except in mating season, they saw little of each other, this wild and sullen pair. But in this season of scarcity they often met for the purpose of hunting down together some game too powerful for either to manage alone. Together, if fortune favoured them, they would perhaps pull down a buck. When they had feasted full, and dragged the carcase into a

thicket for safer hiding, the female would start back in anxious haste for her den. The male would make as if to follow her; but she would turn upon him in such a blaze of fury that he would jump back, sit up on his great haunches, lick his blood-stained chaps, and gaze at her with an innocence as demure as of any tabby that ever made away with the canary. The prudent mother was not to be deceived. Staring back over her shadowy grey shoulder, she would growl and spit and snarl till she was quite out of sight of that dangerous figure, then she would wheel in her tracks and flash off in quite another direction. And her mate had far too much respect for his hide to attempt to follow her.

One day, as she came racing back home from one of these expeditions — now gliding like a flicker of light, now bounding in great, noiseless leaps — a sudden foreboding smote her. She had been away, perhaps, a little longer than usual. Lengthening herself out, she shot forward and in among the huddled rocks. As she arrived, a whiff of pungent scent smote her nostrils. She saw a streak of ruddy-yellow fur disappearing under a bush. With one lightning spring, she came

down upon that bush. But there was nothing there. She saw a large fox just whisking around the next boulder. For one agonized moment she hesitated, raging to pursue and rip him to shreds with her terrific claws. But the mother pull was too strong. She raced on up to the den and darted in with an anxious whimper of inquiry.

Her kittens were all there, undisturbed, and noiselessly nosing for her teats, as they felt her and smelt her bending over them. But she had no time just then to gratify their wants. She was too much concerned about their enemies. Giving them a hurried lick of reassurance, to their squalling indignation she left them abruptly.

Sniffing carefully outside, she quickly satisfied herself that the fox had only come to within some ten feet or so of the entrance; but that was more than enough for her mother fears. The enemy had been reconnoitring, and he had found the hiding-place of her treasures. He was an enemy whom she dreaded, because of his cunning, so much superior to her own. Beside herself with rage and fear, she searched every nook and crevice of the knoll. But, of course, she found noth-

ing of him except the musky smell which he had left behind him so liberally.

As luck would have it, however, at the foot of the knoll, almost directly beneath the lair itself, she found another intruder. Nosing for roots in the rich earth between the rocks was a black bear. His presence there was quite innocent; his thoughts were far from young lynxes. But to the eyes of the anxious mother he was sniffing his way to the hiding-place of her little ones.

Now, the most powerful of lynxes, of course, is no match for a bear. But a mother's a mother, and that makes all the difference in the world. The bear was attentively turning over the moss and sod, unmindful of danger, when a cyclone of claws and teeth and screeches fell upon his neck. Taken so completely by surprise, he fairly bleated, and gave futile clutches over the shoulder with his massive paws, which would have made short work of his audacious assailant could they have fairly reached her. But they touched nothing save a little elusive fur; and the next moment, seized with panic, he wheeled and fled wildly through the cedars. The lynx clung to him, biting and clawing

till a low branch swept her off. Whereupon, after pausing to free her teeth from the long black hairs which they had been so diligently collecting, she sped back to the den with her feelings somewhat relieved. The bear ran on, his panic gradually giving way to indignation, till at last the latter conquered. Then he turned and began slowly retracing his steps. He would find his insolent assailant and do her up. But when he reached the knoll, he changed his mind once more. After all, was it worth while going out of his way to find her? She seemed to be so elusive. He passed around to the other side of the knoll, and let off his resentment in rending to pieces an old ant-log.

To the bear, though so ignominiously routed by his small antagonist, the affair was of no great moment. His hurts were not deep, and they soon were forgotten. But to the mother lynx it was different. Her security was gone. She felt that both the fox and the bear were after her little ones. She no longer dared to hunt at any distance from home; and near home, thanks to her own reputation, it was bad hunting. All she could do was to lie in wait, with infinite

patience, for chickadees and wood-mice; while her hunger grew, and the supply of precious milk in her breasts began to diminish, and the little ones, whose eyes were now just opening, became more and more insistent in their demands.

About three days after the episodes of the fox and the bear, there came to the knoll an immense cow moose, seeking, as the lynx had done, solitude and security. To the other side of the knoll she came, and had no suspicions of the presence of the lynx, who glared down upon her unseen from a bush-screened crevice near the summit. She was black and grim and very formidable-looking, the great moose, and could well have smashed the life out of the giant cat with one stroke of her splayed fore-hoof. So the lynx had no notion of interfering with her. But she was interested in the errand which had brought the dark tree-eater to this retreat, and she licked hopefully her whiskered jaws.

About daybreak, on the soft moss at the foot of the rock, the moose gave birth to a long-legged, shuddering calf. Forgetful at once of all her suffering, she licked the newcomer long and lovingly, till its soft coat was

dry and glossy dark; and at last, along in the warm of the day, it staggered feebly to its feet and made its first effort to nurse. It was grotesquely gaunt, and lank, and big-headed, and loose-jointed, and its sprawling legs were too weak to long support its weight. In two or three minutes it sank down again upon the moss, where it lay staring around with mild, incurious eyes, while its mother gazed upon it in a tender ecstasy. To her it was the one thing of beauty that the whole green forest held.

Suddenly a faint sound, other than that of rustling leaf and twig, caught her vigilant ear. She turned her head sharply. There among the cedar trunks, not a hundred feet away, was the bear, turning over and munching a cluster of bright yellow fungi. A bear! That was the most to be dreaded of all possible enemies. With a harsh cry, a sort of coughing bellow, she rushed at him.

At sight of this black whirlwind sweeping down upon him, the bear was surprised and pained. He was not a very big bear, and she was a very big moose. If capable of reflection — a point on which doctors differ with some acrimony — he perhaps reflected that the

knoll was not a lucky neighbourhood for him — too many mothers and hardly enough mushrooms. In any case, he decided to go away at once. And he acted with such alertness upon this wise decision that he managed to keep a certain distance between his hindquarters and those furiously-pounding hoofs. He felt that he had reason to congratulate himself.

The lynx had been watching from her high crevice when the moose made her mad charge upon the bear. Her pale, round eyes flamed. Soundlessly she dropped from her ambush. There was no cry from the feeble victim. The lynx was too expert and too wary a hunter for that; she wanted no struggle that would attract the mother's attention from the pursuit of the bear. So the unfortunate calf, who had only just opened his eyes upon life, went out of it without knowing what had happened to him. Without an instant's delay, the lynx began dragging the limp but still quivering prey up the rock. Her only chance was to get it speedily beyond the mother's reach.

The lynx was marvellously strong for a beast of her weight, which was not more than

forty odd pounds, and she was desperate with determination. She knew that this prize would keep her from the necessity of leaving the den till her little ones should be past their first helplessness. Nothing should be allowed to snatch it from her. But, for all her furious efforts, so unmanageable was that limp form, with its long, sprawling legs, that her progress up the broken steep was dangerously slow.

Suddenly the moose, realizing that she could not catch the bear, stopped with a wrathful snort. Ploughing up the dank moss with her great outthrust fore-feet, she wheeled about to return to her calf. She started back at a shambling trot, suspecting no evil, and satisfied with herself for having so well routed the enemy. Then she marked that the little one was no longer in his place. She gave one mighty leap forward, her wild eyes sweeping the whole base of the rock, and then, looking upwards, she saw what had befallen.

As that black bulk of vengeance came thundering towards her, the lynx strained desperately to lift her prize beyond its reach. The steep at this point was too abrupt for any moose to climb, but the frantic mother hurled

herself up it so far that her outstretched hoofs struck the rock on either side of the calf's hind-quarters. Daunted for the instant, the lynx let go her hold and shrank away with a snarl. But seeing how far short her assailant had fallen, she sprang forward again and sank her teeth into the victim's throat with confident defiance.

From that wild leap the mother had fallen back violently upon her haunches. Unconscious of the shock, she drew back a few steps and rushed again to the attack. This time she came on less wildly, and the lynx, glaring down upon her over the shoulder of the prey, had no misgivings. But in reality it was now that the wise old moose was most dangerous. Having come triumphant through many seasons, many vicissitudes, she knew how to handle her powers to best advantage, and in that first leap she had seen that her little one was finished past all helping. Revenge was all that she could strive for. As she charged again, she gathered her gaunt legs beneath her at the last of it, and launched herself upwards with a finely calculated effort. Thoroughly deceived, the lynx clung obstinately to her hold, with ears flattening back in angry

scorn. But this time she had seriously miscalculated. In the next second one of those huge, battering fore-hoofs smote down upon her. It crushed her head right back between her shoulders, and her tense body, suddenly relaxed, slumped forward upon the neck of her victim.

Falling back as before, because it was impossible for her to gain any foothold on that steep, the moose charged once more and repeated her wonderful leap. This time her stroke brought both the bodies tumbling over each other to the ground. The victor, now sober and deliberate in her fury, pawed them carefully apart and proceeded to stamp the carcase of the lynx into the earth. When this was accomplished to her satisfaction, she went and nosed her little one tenderly for several minutes, muttering thickly in her shaggy throat. Then, with drooping head, she stood over it motionless for hours, till the last of the sunset had faded out, and all the forest was in blackness. At last the moon got up white above the tree-tops, and ran pale fingers down the face of the rock till they uncovered the grim scene at its base. The moose, as if suddenly pulling herself together

to accept the inevitable, lifted her great black head, sniffed the night air with wide nostrils, and made off noiselessly through the cedars.

An hour or two later the bear came cautiously prowling up. Unseen himself, he had seen his late enemy go stalking by with an air of no more concern in that part of the forest. Much puzzled, he had come to seek a solution of the mystery. He found the solution entirely to his taste. He grunted contemptuously over the pounded remnants of the lynx, and then, well able to appreciate such a dainty, made a hearty meal of young moose meat. He sat down on his haunches and grumbled happily over his repast, perhaps thinking how favoured were the bears over all the other dwellers of the wilderness. It would have been a sound and true reflection, could he but have made it, and no more than the due of the Power which had been so generous to his kind.

Meanwhile, the baby lynxes, in their den, now hungry past all caution and mewing harshly, might have been left to a lingering and piteous death. But Nature is seldom so cruel. Stealing through the black shadows, and darting across the patches of moonlight, came the fox, anxious to see if anything new

had happened at the knoll. Peering from a thicket, he marked the bear at his feast, and soon made out to understand. Stealing about to explore the knoll, he presently caught the cries of the kittens. This was a phenomenon not hard for him to interpret. After a prudent investigation, he crept into the den. There was some spitting, feeble but courageous, and then the cries of loneliness and hunger stopped. The fox was too businesslike to play with and torment his victims, as one of the cat family would do, but killed them at once and made haste to carry them off to his den. Though not without a healthy edge to his own appetite, he thought first of his mate and cubs, to whom he was untiringly devoted.

The knoll being now no longer occupied by the terrible lynx mother, the lesser folk of the forest began cautiously to revisit it, though they made no long stay in that neighbourhood, because they never knew when the den at the summit might attract some dangerous occupant. Before long the bones of those two bodies at the foot of the rock were polished clean and white, and then the place fell deserted except for the chickadees and the woodpeckers.

As the summer drew to a close, and the first glimmers of autumn scarlet began to tip the maples, scattering here and there across the wilderness reappeared a few rabbits. Their enemies being now less numerous, they multiplied with amazing rapidity, as if thinking they had the earth to replenish; and soon again tall ears and bulging eyes were flickering through the coverts, sensitive, cleft nostrils questioning every air, and fluffy white tails bobbing up out of the gold-brown fern beds. The rabbits did not love the cedar swamp, with its wet moss and black, half-hidden pools, but a few of their more adventurous spirits roamed everywhere.

One fresh October morning, when the birch trees were all gold among the grey rocks of the knoll, a roving buck rabbit came to the foot of it and stumbled upon that bunch of white bones. At first he was much frightened, and with two prodigious leaps took hiding in the nearest thicket. But the bones made no hostile move whatever, and presently he felt somewhat reassured. After he had stared at them for some time, he concluded that they were harmless. With uncomprehending curiosity he hopped all around them, and then

sat up beside them on his haunches, his long ears erect in foolish inquiry. The last thing he could guess was that he and his kind were responsible for that pile of bleaching bones.

The Invaders

THE lake was set in the high barrens. Its wide surface, as smooth as glass under the unobstructed sunset, was of an intense yet faintly smoky orange, shading into green in the deep, reflected zenith. Its far-off, western shore-line, fringed with a low growth of firs, was toothed and black against the sky. The eastern shore, but vaguely to be marked in the lone, pervasive glow, was flat, and naked except for a thicket of willow and poplar about the mouth of an inflowing stream. The flooding, tranquil colour, the low remoteness of the encircling horizon rim, the apparent convexity of the lake surface, which seemed to bosom upwards toward the impending dome of air, agreed together in an unutterable beauty of desolation.

Presently a black speck — no, two black specks — appeared upon the sheen of the

perfect mirror, detaching themselves from the dark edge of the western shore. Pushing out swiftly across the radiance, side by side, they broke it with long, smooth, diverging ripples, which gleamed changefully behind them as they drew their trail straight out toward the centre of the lake. Under the lonely glow the black specks revealed themselves as the heads of two swimming moose, a cow and a bull.

They swam completely submerged except for their dark, uncouth but splendid heads, their long, prehensile muzzles outstretched and cleaving the surface. The huge antlers of the bull, massive and broadly palmated, lay back flat on the surface behind him, above the turmoil of his unseen, powerfully labouring shoulders. In the eyes of the pair there was a questioning fear, a certain wildness as of panic. It was a strange look for these tall lords of the wilderness to be wearing at this time of year, when the gigantic bulls front all creation arrogantly in their lust of battle. But the one terror that could daunt them had come upon them suddenly — the terror of the unknown.

The pair had been on the open strip of

beach between the fir forest wherein they roamed and the waterside where they were accustomed to wallow and pull lily roots, when the terror came upon them in full force, and drove them out across the orange mirror of the lake to seek refuge in the barrens of the further shore. And neither knew what it was that they were fleeing from. For several days the cow had been uneasy, the bull angry and suspicious. The sense of some vague, uncomprehended peril, approaching but still impalpable, was in the air. From the wonder and fear and amazement of other and feebler kindreds of the wild, it had come by some obscure telepathy to trouble the nerves of the great, imperturbable moose.

But in the chill glory of this October sunset the mystery had come nearer — had grown more tangible without becoming any the less a mystery. As the cow stood alone by the waterside, calling her mate, she had felt oppressed with a dim apprehension that something other than her mate might come in response to the uncouth passion of her appeal. And her mate had come suddenly, watchfully, noiselessly, as if in half expectation of being intercepted or ambushed. His

tall, black shape was at her side, like a shadow, while her first calls were yet hoarsely thrilling the stillness.

Even as they stood conferring with sensitive, intimate muzzles, a red buck had gone leaping by, manifestly terrified, yet with an air of irresolution curiously unlike the usual whole-heartedness of his flight. Their ardour was chilled for a moment by the impression of his inexplicable fear, and they stared after him apprehensively, as if the familiar sight of a running buck had suddenly become a portent.

The strange terror of the buck was hardly more than well forgotten when a fox emerged hastily from the bushes. Seeing the pair of moose absorbed in each other, and standing there black and conspicuous by the waterside, careless of what eyes might mark them, he came stepping delicately down the beach and seated himself on his haunches not a dozen feet away. His shrewd eyes scanned them with intense inquiry, as if wondering if their careless confidence represented a strength under which he might shelter himself. At other times the lordly pair of lovers would have resented his in-

trusion and driven him off; but to-day they simply stared at him with anxious inquiry. The look in their eyes seemed to satisfy the fox that there was no help here to be relied upon. He glanced uneasily over his shoulder toward the dark fringes of fir whence he had come, rose slowly to his feet, stepped past them superciliously, and went trotting on down the edge of the lake. Their keen eyes, following him closely, saw him lengthen out into the gallop of desperate flight the moment he reached the cover of an osier thicket. The sight of that sudden desperation, in a beast so wise as the fox, unnerved them in spite of themselves. They had seen many foxes, but never before a fox who acted so peculiarly. What had he wanted of them? Why had he so searchingly looked them over? And then why had he fled? They shivered, drew closer together, wheeled their dark bulks about till their sterns were toward the shining water, and stared intensely into the dense mass of the forest where the fox had gazed so curiously. Those sombre masses of spruce and fir were their home, their secure and familiar covert, but now they questioned them, distrusted them. What

treachery could the silent shades be preparing?

The eyes of the moose, though keen, discovered nothing. But presently their big ears, thrust forward and rigid with interrogation, caught the ghost of a sound across the immense silence. It might almost be the padding of many feet. Then here and there, from the depths of certain spots of blacker shadow, flashed a greenish gleam, points of pale fire, which might be eyes. At last a breath of air, an exhalation of the forest so light as not even to stir the long fringes of hair pendant from the bull's throat, came to their distended nostrils. It was a scent unknown to them, but indescribably sinister. Its menace daunted them. Indignant and appalled, they backed down slowly, side by side, into the water, still keeping their eyes fixed upon the forest. Then, wheeling suddenly, they swam out into the orange radiance, straining toward the refuge of the far-off opposite shore.

II

THERE were eight gigantic wolves in the pack, and one much smaller and slenderer, who seemed, none the less, to wield a certain influence over her fellows. The eight were such portentous figures as one would never expect to see in the eastern wilderness, being of the most formidable breed of Alaskan timber wolf, long of jaw and flank, broad of skull, massive of shoulder, deep of chest, and each powerful enough to slash the throat of a caribou cow at one snap and to pull her down in her run. Yet, with one exception, they had never seen Alaska, or a running caribou, or the wild rivers rolling north, or the peaks of endless snow. They had been born south of the St. Lawrence, in the limited and half-tamed forests of Northern Vermont, and they had come sweeping north-eastward in the search for more spacious solitudes.

The establishing of so great and fierce a company in the ordered east had come about in this way. Some years earlier, at a village in Northern Vermont, a splendid timber wolf

had made his escape from the caravan of a travelling menagerie. He had been hunted, with abundant hue and cry, for several days. But he was sagacious. He did not halt in his long, untiring gallop till he had put safe leagues between himself and his pursuers, and found a forest wild enough to hide in. He had hunted, with wise discretion, deer and hare and other wild creatures only, and had strictly withheld himself from all quarry that he thought to be under the protection of man. Thanks to this prudence, no man suspected his existence. After a while, meeting in the neighbourhood of a village a long-jawed, wolfish-looking mongrel with husky and deerhound in her veins, he had easily induced her to leave her master and take to the wild life for which she had always had a dim craving. She had hunted beside him faithfully, and given him two litters — big-boned whelps, which grew up as huge and savage as their sire, but far less sagacious than he, and of more evil temper, as is apt to be the case in such a cross. They obeyed their sire and leader because they feared him and felt his dominance, and they had a respect for

the virulent and sudden flame of their slim mother's wrath. But as time went on, and wild game grew scarce, they could not be withheld from foraging near the villages, and so they presently drew to themselves the notice of men. When a few stray heifers had been done away with, and many sheep devoured, and several innocent dogs shot on suspicion, then the wise old leader pulled the pack sternly together and led it eastward.

The eastward march was long and surrounded with many perils. Sometimes there was little game, and the pack went long hungry. Sometimes it was hard to find wooded country to conceal their journeying, and sometimes, forced to take toll of the flocks of some village, the settlers swarmed out after them with a tumult of dogs and guns and curses, which by and by taught caution to the most turbulent of the whelps. Several carried shot-pellets under their hides, to teach them that their leader's prudence had reason in it. And by the time they reached those wild regions of spruce forest, lakes, and tangled watercourses where the boundaries of Maine impinge on those of New Brunswick and Quebec, they had

acquired discipline and caution. It was an invasion formidable beyond anything the wilderness had conceived in its worst dreams that now swept on through the high solitudes to northward of the Upsalquitch and Ottanoonsis.

Among the furred and feathered dwellers of these eastern wilds there was no tradition of any such scourge as this swift, ravening pack. Of wolves there was, indeed, a sort of dim, inherited memory, but it had to do with the small eastern or "cloudy" wolf, courageous enough in its way, but not worth having nightmares about. No bear or moose had ever paid much attention to the cloudy wolf, which had been practically unknown in these parts for upwards of half a century. But rumours of the new scourge carried a chill to hearts which had hitherto had little acquaintance with fear, and a sort of obscure panic heralded the invasion all down the wild rivers and the desolate plateau lakes. So it fell that, of the ruling tribes of the region, none for a time crossed the path of the invaders. The swarming rabbits and the abundant deer kept the pack in fair hunting,

and at the same time, in their astonished retreat, led it on ever eastward.

But this which they were now come to was a country of bears, and it was inevitable that the pack should fall foul of them. One day, as the eight swept noiselessly on the hot trail of a deer — noiselessly because the wise leader had taught them the need of silence in the dangerous forests of their birth, and they seldom gave tongue except when the urge of the full moon was too overpowering to be resisted — they almost ran into a huge black beast which stood directly across the trail, clawing at a rotten stump. They stopped short, spread out into a half-circle, and stood on tiptoes, the hair on their ridged necks and shoulders bristling stiffly.

The bear was equally surprised. An old, solitary, and bad-tempered individual of his highly individual race, he had neither heard of nor sensed the invasion of the terrible hybrids, nor would he have paid much attention had he sensed it ever so clearly. He was not a subject for panics. Whirling about to face the intruders, he sat back on his haunches, grumbled deeply in his throat,

lifted one great paw, with its long, curved claws projecting, and, with lowered head, eyed his opponents fearlessly. He was ready for a fight, without regard to consequences. At the same time he was equally ready for peace, on condition that he was left severely alone. He was too interested in grubs and berries and rotten logs to think of seeking a fight for its own sake.

The wolves were not hungry, and they felt that the bear would prove no easy prey. In an irresolute expectancy, they waited till their leader should give signal for attack. Their leader, however, who sat on his haunches, with lolling tongue, just before the centre of the half-circle, was in no hurry to begin. He was studying the foe, and also waiting for a move. As befitted so wary a leader, he had the gift of patience.

It was a gift the bear had not. Presently, appearing to make up his mind that the gaunt strangers had no wish to interfere with his pursuit of wood-grubs, he turned once more to the stump and tore out the whole side of it at one wrench of his great forearm.

In that same instant the fiery little mongrel

darted forward like a snake and snapped at his hindquarters, hoping to hamstring him. With such lightning swiftness, however, did he whirl about and strike at her, that she got no more than a mouthful of fur in her teeth, and only escaped that eviscerating stroke by hurling herself clean over, like a loosed spring. A long red weal on her flank showed that she had not escaped completely.

Following in a second upon her rash attack, the rest of the pack had surged forward; but, seeing that his mate had cleared herself, the leader halted abruptly, and with a savage yelp tried to check his followers. They obeyed, for they saw what sort of a foe they had to deal with. But one, the most headlong, had gone too far. A sweeping buffet caught him fair high up on the chest. It hurled him clean back among his fellows, his neck broken and his throat torn out by the rake of those iron claws. As he lay, twitching and slavering, the leader surveyed him critically and came to a quick decision. It was no use risking, perhaps breaking, the pack upon so mighty an adversary, when their proper quarry was just ahead, and there was no desperate famine

to drive them. Summoning the pack sternly to order, he led it aside at a gallop, picked up the trail of the deer again, a hundred yards further on, and left the body of the victim to whatever fate might befall it. The bear glared after them, mumbling angrily, till they were out of sight. Then he slouched over to the body, sniffed at it, turned it over with his paw, and went calmly back to his stump to look for grubs. He had no appetite for either wolf or dog.

The pack meanwhile, raging and amazed, went on, and in due time made its kill. Feasting on the warm venison, it got over its discomfiture, and its lost member was easily forgotten. But it had learned a useful lesson.

It was two days after this that the wolves came to the lake of the barrens, and from the dark covert of the fir woods stared forth wonderingly upon the first moose which they had ever seen.

Two days earlier the wolves would have regarded these two tall, ungainly shapes on the beach, black against the water, as but a kind of exaggerated deer, and would have flown at them without hesitation. But now

they remembered the bear. They did not quite trust the colour of these two high-shouldered, long-muzzled strangers, with their wide splay hooves and indifferent air. They waited for the signal of their wary leader, and that signal, again, the wary leader was in no hurry to give. He was uncertain what prowess, what unexpected energies, might lurk in these bulks that seemed so like and yet so unlike deer. But when at last the two moose, daunted by the unknown, suddenly plunged into the water and swam off through the orange glow, he concluded they were a quarry to be hunted. Alone he stalked forth upon the open beach, gazed fixedly after the fugitives for some moments, till he made sure where they were bound for, and then stared appraisingly up and down the shores, as if calculating the circuit of the water. Having apparently decided which would be the shortest way around, he stalked back into the shadows. A moment later the pack was under way at full run, making for the head of the lake, some seven or eight miles distant.

The pair of moose, in the meantime, gained the opposite shore and stalked up,

black and dripping, beside the willows. But they did not stop there. The fever of change was upon them, and when a moose gets going, he is liable to go far. With their long, shambling trot, which seems so effortless, yet so inexorably eats up the miles, they followed along the stream till the orange gleam was left far behind, and the bushy levels of the barren began to lift into low, rounded uplands, sparsely wooded. They had but one purpose — to put themselves as far as possible from those flitting green eyes and padding footfalls of the black fir woods by the lake.

They little guessed that the path of their indignant flight was converging toward that of the green eyes and padding feet.

III

It was a night of early moonrise, and the moon near the full. Far back among the low uplands the stream broadened out into a series of wide, still reaches that formed practically a sort of winding lake. At an abrupt elbow of this lake-like expansion,

where a clump of tall water-ash, poplar, and elderberry thicket made a little island in a space of open wild meadow, lay hidden two hunters. They had come up from the coast to eastward, crossed over the height of land, and made their way down into this remote valley, looking for moose.

Both men carried rifles. One, a gigantic figure of a man, and from his dress obviously the guide, carried also a light axe and a long roll of birch bark shaped something like a trumpet. This was the season for moose-calling.

Seating themselves with their backs to the trunk of a big water-ash, and in such a position that they were fairly hidden, while commanding a free view of all approaches to their ambush, the two made themselves as comfortable as possible for a long, motionless wait. After some ten or fifteen minutes of a stillness which would strain the nerves of any one not trained to it, Adam Moore, the giant guide, lifted the birch-bark tube to his lips and sounded through it the strange call of the cow moose, harsh and formless, but indescribably wild and lonely — the very voice, as it seemed, of the untamed solitudes.

It came lingeringly from the guide's cunning lips.

"Faith, Adam," murmured Rawson, "but you've got a fetching note!"

Moore allowed himself a faint grin of acknowledgment, for this lean, hard-bitten, cool-eyed Englishman, who had hunted big game in every corner of the earth, was one of the very few sportsmen whose commendation he cared a farthing for. After a few moments' pause, he sounded his appeal again, with added poignancy. Then he lowered the birchen tube, laid it across his knees, and waited.

There was not a breath of air. The unstirring, soundless wilderness seemed as if it had been enchanted into glass under the spell of the blue-white moon. But suddenly there came a far-off sound of crashing branches. It drew nearer swiftly.

"I *thought* that would fetch him, Adam," murmured Rawson, no louder than a breath of air in the poplar leaves.

He lifted his rifle and rose softly to one knee.

A moment later Moore laid a great hand softly on his arm.

"Queer, that," he whispered — "there's *two* coming!"

Then from the thick growths across the meadow, perhaps three hundred yards away, burst the two fugitives. Even at that distance one could see that they were sore pressed and spent. The cow, in particular, staggered as she came on. The antlers of the bull were magnificent, but Rawson saw only the splendid beast's distress, and lowered his gun involuntarily.

"I can't make it out," muttered the guide, rising cautiously to his feet behind the elder bushes.

The fugitives came straight on, making for the refuge of the water-ash grove, heedless of what perils it might hold for them in their terror of the unknown menace that pursued. Half-way across the meadow lay a fallen trunk, carried there and stranded by some past freshet. The tall bull took it in his stride, but the cow, apparently half blind with exhaustion, stumbled over it, fell forward on her muzzle with a bleating groan, and lay as if she no longer cared what Fate might bring her.

Finding his mate no longer at his side, the

bull halted abruptly, swung back, lowered his huge head and sniffed at her solicitously. He pushed her with his muzzle; he even struck her smartly with the sharp points of his antlers, striving to force her to further effort. Then, apparently making up his mind that his efforts were vain, he stood over her and stared back along the trail by which they had come.

"He's game, all right!" muttered Rawson, his eyes aglow with admiration.

The next moment the undergrowth across the meadow parted with a rush, and gaunt forms came leaping into the moonlight.

"Wolves! *Timber* wolves!" exclaimed Moore in a startled voice. He had been west, and knew the breed. Eight of them! He flung down his birch-bark horn and snatched up his rifle.

Mad from their long chase, the wolves did not hesitate a second, but sprang straight on their quarry, their grey leader half a length to the front. As they came, their bared white fangs and cold eyes gleaming in the moonlight, the waiting bull never flinched. At the instant when the leader sprang for his throat, he reared, towering colossal over

the onslaught, and struck out furiously with his knife-edged hooves. Unprepared for this novel defence, the leader, in mid-spring, caught that pile-driver blow full in the face. He went down under it, with his whole head crushed in.

The next second came the crash of Rawson's rifle. Another wolf dropped. But the rest were already leaping upon the gallant bull's flank and shoulders, striving to pull him down. Raging at the sight, the Englishman rushed forward to his defence, firing once more, with what effect he did not stop to notice, and then swinging his rifle like a club. Moore, unable to shoot lest he should strike Rawson, dropped his rifle, swung his axe, and followed with huge, leaping strides.

Rawson was bringing his butt down across the back of the nearest wolf, erect and tearing at the bull's neck, when from the tail of his eye he saw a smaller, slimmer beast darting at him from the side. Instinctively he shouted "Down! Down!" and delivered a spasmodic kick at his assailant, catching it under the jaw. Had he been less fully occupied with what was going on before him, he would have been much astonished to see this one of

his adversaries drop its tail between its legs with a yelp, slink around behind him, and stand staring in bewildered submission. The mongrel had been recalled suddenly to her ancient allegiance by the command in a master's voice.

The hybrids, with no longer their wise pack-leader to teach them prudence, and maddened by this unlooked-for interference with their kill, now turned a portion of their fury upon their new opponents. For a moment Rawson had his hands full to defend himself against the leaps of a flaming-eyed beast, whom he could only fight off with short, desperate jabs, having no room for a conclusive blow. At the same time, however, at the other side of the *mêlée*, the giant guide was swinging his axe with swift effect, and the invaders were reduced to three. The bull, his neck and shoulders streaming with blood, but suddenly freed from close pressure, was lashing out once more with his battering fore-hooves in a blind fashion that made him a peril to friend and foe alike. As luck would have it, however, he grazed the haunches of Rawson's adversary, causing the brute to whirl upon him with a snarl. The

diversion gave Rawson a chance for a full, swinging blow, ending that quarrel. Of the remaining two wolves, one, springing up sideways at the guide's face, was met by a low sweep of the axe, which shore clean through his loins. At the sound of his dying yelp, the survivor leaped backwards, wheeled, and fled from the lost battle. As he ran, lengthening himself out belly to earth, Moore swung his axe again. Launched with the unerring aim of the expert backwoodsman, it hurtled through the air, swooped, and clove the fugitive's haunches. The guide strode calmly forward, recovered his weapon, and with a tap on the crown put the writhing beast out of its misery.

By this time the cow, having somewhat recovered from her exhaustion, was struggling to her feet. Seeing this, the bull turned threateningly upon his rescuers. Rawson jumped away just in time to avoid a savage thrust.

"It's evident we're not wanted here any longer," he laughed, turning to go back to the grove. As he did so, the mongrel, hitherto unnoticed because she had made herself so discreetly inconspicuous, ranged up along-

side him with a confiding humility that was unmistakable. The Englishman eyed her for a second or two in amazement, then remembered and understood.

"You get out of this, and be thankful you get out with a whole skin!" he ordered coldly. "You're a turncoat!" He was about to enforce his command with the butt of his gun, but the guide, coming up at that moment, intervened.

"No," said he decisively, "don't drive her away. I'm glad you've refused her. I'll keep her myself. She'll be worth a dozen of your ordinary brutes that have never had the spunk to kick over the traces. I reckon she's learnt her lesson, an' she won't run wild again."

A Digger of Tubes

FORCED out of his old dwelling, which had been both commodious and retired, Hackee, the striped chipmunk, moved indignantly over to the next hillside, and chose a site for his new home near the south face of the dilapidated stone wall which separated the beech wood from the upland pasture.

He had had a peculiarly exasperating experience. Quite by accident, an ill-conditioned but obstinate mongrel terrier from the farm down in the valley had found the narrow entrance to his underground abode, and had started to dig him out. This, of course, was a vain undertaking for any dog, for not only was the entrance tube several yards in length and leading a good three feet below the surface, but the central chamber, or dwelling proper, had another exit, yards away, by which Hackee had come out at his leisure, to perch on a near-by

fence-rail and shriek chattering curses at the foolish dog. Having a strain of dachshund among the many which went to his pedigree, the terrier had really done a fine piece of burrowing before he realized the futility of his efforts, and backed out of the hole, with eyes and fur full of dirt, to give ear to Hackee's shrill insults, and trot off with assumed indifference in search of some more advantageous enterprise.

This had been late in the afternoon. On the edge of evening, a family of skunks had come by, and had at once adopted the roomy burrow which the terrier had excavated for them. Lazy burrowers themselves, the skunks were no fools. They knew how to profit by a good thing when it came their way. They had continued the work of the dog till they reached Hackee's central chamber. To Hackee's voluble and stuttering wrath, they had taken possession of it at once, enlarging it to suit their dimensions. They were certainly no company for a chipmunk. There was nothing for it but to yield place to these lazy but formidable invaders. Hackee and his whole family had taken themselves off, stealing through the

violet dusk with a silent diffidence quite unlike their chattering daylight audacity. They knew that the dusk was peculiarly dangerous for them; so they had scattered at once, seeking refuge in the burrows of friendly neighbours, or in nooks which their daylight wanderings had revealed to them. It had been a nerve-trying night for Hackee, trembling in a hastily enlarged mouse-hole dangerously near the fox-and-weasel-haunted surface. As soon as the full pink tide of sunrise had driven the night prowlers to their dens, he had set himself to the securing of new quarters. For none knew better than he that, to a ground-squirrel with no underground retreat, this sunny hillside, these cheerful, tranquil beech woods, these open pastures with their calm-eyed cattle, were a region of imminent and deadly hazard.

Pending a decision as to the exact spot where he would begin to sink his tunnel, Hackee kept along the old stone wall, because, with its chinks and crannies, it was more likely than any other path to offer him a hiding-place in case of emergency. In the early sunshine there were many other chipmunks abroad, out for their morning

sip of dew. They were playing or foraging among the leaves, racing in utter abandon of mirth up and down the old wall, or sitting up alertly to chirp and chatter to each other their satisfaction at the promise of a fine day. But Hackee felt himself quite alone among them. He knew that each of them had a safe burrow close at hand. He had no chattering or chirping to do. He was a thing apart, a chipmunk without a hole. And all his wits were anxiously, concentratedly, on the alert against the perils which he knew might assail him from earth or sky at any instant.

He was not even hungry, for the moment, because his anxiety was so absorbing. Therefore it was that he, being the most vigilant, was first to catch sight of a pigeon-hawk which came stealthily through the branches of a great birch tree near the wall, and dropped like a fly-catcher in the hope of capturing one of the morning revellers. But Hackee's piercing chirrup of alarm, ere he whisked into a crevice, had been enough. Every chipmunk heard, and dodged with a celerity which even that swift hawk could not match. The alarm cry passed the length of

the wall. The hawk pounced this way and that, zigzagging with a speed to confuse the eye. But not a chipmunk could he catch; and presently, in the sulks, he sailed off to try his luck with less nimble game.

When he was gone, Hackee whisked out from between the stones, ran on some fifty feet further, and stopped to peer about him carefully. This seemed a likely spot for his purpose, and it was not overcrowded. On the pasture side of the wall a big chipmunk came out from a hole about three feet distant, whisked up the stones, and scolded insolently at the stranger. But Hackee was not insulted. He *was* a stranger, and he knew he must take the consequences. He proposed to get over being a stranger just as quickly as possible, and to this end he decided to establish himself just opposite his insulter, on the other side of the stone wall. Here the beech trees were scattered, and the sward was close and firm, such as he loved, and the autumn sunlight lay warm under the wall.

Some three or four feet from the wall he marked a spreading, prickly bush of juniper, under which, as he calculated, he might

begin his digging operations without much fear of interruption. All seemed secure. No hawk or fox was to be seen. The red squirrels and the blue-jays wrangled merrily and carelessly in the trees — a sure sign that there was no marauder about. Along the wall and on the close, gossamery turf at either side, other chipmunks gambolled or foraged or scratched at the sod with their clever little hand-like paws. And a soft, irregular *tonk-tink*, *tonka-tink*, *tonkle* came from the line of red-and-white cows loitering up to the pasture from the milking-shed.

Hackee gave a chirrup of satisfaction, and was on the very point of jumping down from the wall, when a piercing chirr of alarm stiffened him to stone. Everywhere, on the instant, he saw chipmunk after chipmunk flash frantically to its hole, shrieking the great danger signal as it vanished.

For half a second Hackee's heart stood still, for this, according to the signals, was one of the most dreaded enemies of his tribe — a weasel. From this enemy, a swift pursuer and a tireless, implacable tracker, there was but one safe refuge — the chipmunk's hole, too narrow at the entrance for a weasel to

squeeze himself into. And Hackee had no hole to take refuge in. He knew that he would be smelt out immediately if he tried to hide in some cranny of the wall. For some precious moments he stood there alone in the perilous world, his sharp stripes of black and cream vivid on the foxy red of his cheeks and sides. Suddenly the weasel slipped into view, emerging upon the top of the wall, a long, low, sinuous, deadly apparition, with a vicious, pointed face and cruel eyes. He was not more than ten feet away.

Hackee came to himself. He bounded into the air as if galvanized, came down on the pasture side of the wall, and slipped like an eel down into the burrow of the stranger chipmunk. The weasel was so close at his twinkling heels that Hackee heard the snap of jaws just behind the tip of his tail.

Exasperated at this escape when he had felt sure of an easy kill, the weasel strove, with a snarl, to force his triangular head down the narrow entrance. As he knew, however, from many a previous effort, this was a waste of time. He presently gave it up, and darted off on the trail of a rabbit

which was unlucky enough to go hopping by at that moment.

Hackee knew well enough that, as a stranger to the burrow, and especially as an invader from another colony, he need by no means look for a welcome in his forced refuge. He kept near the entrance, therefore, trembling and making himself small, and hoping that the proprietor would not appear. But it was a vain hope. Within a half minute the proprietor did appear, and rushed at Hackee open-mouthed with a most inhospitable squeal. Hackee understood very well that etiquette required him to withdraw from that hole at once. But etiquette was of little concern for him so long as he thought the weasel might be waiting outside. He met the attack with the courage of necessity, and for a few seconds the narrow confines of the tube were filled with chirrups and squeals and flying foxy fur.

Suddenly the proprietor, indignant at this refusal of Hackee's to go out and feed the foe, withdrew to seek reinforcements. Hackee understood what his withdrawal meant. He had no wish to fight the whole family. Slipping back to the entrance, he

stuck the very tip of his nose out and sniffed. The taint of weasel was on the air, but it was certainly disappearing. Very cautiously he put his whole head out and peered around with keen, wary eyes. The weasel was nowhere in sight. For a little he waited there, half in and half out. Then came a scurrying of feet behind him in the depths of the burrow. He darted forth discreetly and whisked into a hole in the wall. The next moment the inhospitable household came forth one by one, and began chattering uncomplimentary things about him which he did not think it worth his while replying to. Slyly peering forth with one eye from his hiding-place, he noticed that all this chatter failed to bring back the weasel. This being proof enough that the coast was now clear, he whisked out, jumped over the wall, and under the shelter of the juniper bush where he proposed to have his front door.

He began by digging a round hole, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. With sharp, jerky motions he packed the edges hard and firm, till the diameter was enlarged to a full inch. The earth, every

morsel of it, he carried off in his capacious cheek pouches — which stretched far back under the loose skin of his neck — to empty it under another bush half a dozen yards away. He was much too wary to leave the fresh earth, to betray him, on the grass beside the entrance; and, moreover, he was too cunning to leave any trail between this dumping-ground and his place of operations. He made the journey to and fro by great leaps, swerving erratically now to one side, now to the other.

The entrance looked hardly wide enough to admit his head. But that, he knew, was sufficient; for where his head could go through, there could go through also his whole lithe body, which, for all its strength, was as supple almost as a glove. At a depth of less than an inch, however, he began to enlarge the shaft gradually. He worked with a nervous, jerky vehemence. Every half minute he would back out and lift his head — whiskers, forehead and ears covered with earth — to take a swift look about and assure himself that no enemies were approaching. And his trips to the other bush, his dumping-ground, took place

with amazing frequency, so resolute was he that not a grain of new soil should remain beside his doorway.

The shaft which Hackee was digging so assiduously led straight downward. At a depth of four or five inches its diameter was sufficient for him to turn around in it comfortably. At this diameter he kept it. He could now work with more security and satisfaction, because, being completely hidden, he was not compelled to look about him for enemies every half minute. Turning himself round and round, he packed the walls of the shaft hard as he went, and so reduced considerably the number of his trips to the dumping-ground.

Straight downward the strenuous digger sank his shaft through the light soil to a depth of nearly four feet. Then he turned at an abrupt angle, and began running his tube diagonally, with a gentle upward slope, towards the stone wall. But by this time he had done so much excavation that he felt the need of finding a new dumping-ground, it being against his doctrine to make any of his operations too conspicuous. Moreover, having now a refuge, a place that he could

call his own, however unfinished, he began to realize that he was hungry. Such a bundle of energy and fiery nerves as a chipmunk cannot go long without feeding his forces.

Whisking forth from his hole, he sprang to the wall, ran up it, and perched himself on its highest stone to look about. He sat up now with a confident flirt of his tail, chattered a defiant proclamation of proprietorship, and proceeded to make a hasty but necessary toilet, combing the earth from his ears and fur. Several other chipmunks, belonging to the immediate neighbourhood, eyed him doubtfully, as if half inclined to combine and drive him away. But his assured air had its effect, and he was not interfered with.

His toilet accomplished, he sprang down again from the wall and began rummaging for nuts among the leaves beneath the nearest tree. But this was ground that had evidently been well gone over. He went on deeper into the grove. It was a pleasant place for his foraging. The bland autumn sunlight came sifting down through the browning leaves. There was no wind,

but the branches were gay with screaming blue-jays and chirring, . jibing red-squirrels; and from time to time two or three nuts would come pattering down, either dropping of their own ripeness, or jarred off by the tree-top revellers. Hackee was not long in making his meal; and then, being ever a provident soul, he began to cram his cheek-pouches.

While he was thus occupied, a trim moose-bird bounced down hard upon the leaves a few feet ahead of him, scrutinized him with bright, impudent eyes, squawked harshly, and finally made a rush at him with open beak and lifted wings. But Hackee knew the moose-bird for a mischievous bluffer and practical joker, and he carelessly went on gathering nuts.

For a few seconds the fantastic bird danced about him, getting more and more excited at finding herself ignored. It looked as if she might almost work herself up to the supreme audacity of tweaking the busy forager's tail. But suddenly there came a scream of warning from the sentinel blue-jay in a near-by tree-top. It was taken up on the instant by a chorus of shrill voices.

The moose-bird flew up to a convenient branch, and Hackee, thinking it might be a hawk that was coming, whisked under a root and peered forth anxiously.

There was no sign of a hawk; but presently he made out two blue-jays, in the next tree, peering and scolding down at something on the ground. Their accents told him it was a fox. If so, this hiding under the root was no place for him. Slipping around the trunk, in the hope of putting it between himself and the enemy's eye, he made a dart for the wall. But the fox saw him and gave chase.

It was a desperate race, but Hackee won. He whisked down into his hole just as the fox arrived. At the foot of the shaft, however, he crouched trembling. He had forgotten till now that the unfinished tube might not be a refuge, but a trap. He knew that the fox was a good digger. His heart thumped wildly, and he crowded himself into the beginning of the level gallery, fearing lest the fox should look down and perceive his predicament.

If the fox had been young and ignorant, or excitable enough to indulge in apparently

futile effort, Hackee's career would have come to an end at this point. But, happily for him, this fox was a wise one. He knew that chipmunks not only had deep and elaborate burrows, but also that they always dug them with more than one exit. How was he to guess that this case was the one exception in a thousand instances? He blinked shrewdly, threw a quick, sharp glance about to see if he might not snap up the fugitive in the act of emerging from some back-door, and then went trotting off indifferently down along the wall, pouncing on the fat locusts as he went.

As soon as Hackee had recovered his composure, he fell again to his digging, and soon had his level tube advanced a couple of feet. According to the plan which he was carrying in his capable little brain, the central chamber, or main habitation, was to come directly under the wall; and then, for the better baffling of all kinds of enemies, the second entrance was to be on the other side of the wall, in the pasture field. But by this time he was once more hungry. And now he remembered the stores which had been left behind in the old burrow. Some

of them, doubtless, being in narrow side galleries, would be well away from the intruding skunks, who had no interest, moreover, in the nuts and grains and roots which make up chipmunks' hoard. He hoped to be able to come at these treasures, by a little tunnelling, without being brought into contact with the objectionable usurpers.

Reaching the old home and slipping in by the back door, he found that several other members of his household had anticipated him. They had stopped up the back exit a little way from the central chamber, thus cutting themselves off from the skunk family, and they were now busily engaged in feasting on the accumulated stores. Hackee followed their example till his own hunger was satisfied, and then lured them back, each with crammed pouches, to the new home beside the stone wall, where they all fell to with a zest at the work of excavating.

In two or three days the new home was finished, and all the accessible stores from the old place safely removed to it. The main tube, from the original entrance shaft, ran on a gentle upward slope for a distance of some seven or eight feet to the central

chamber, the real dwelling of the family. This chamber, perhaps a couple of feet in length, but considerably less in width, and nearly a foot high to the centre of its arched ceiling, was spread with a thick layer of the finest and silkiest of dry grasses. It lay exactly beneath the stone wall. Off it led several short storage galleries, to be enlarged or duplicated as the accumulation of stores might call for. Another tube, five or six feet long and slanting slightly downward, was run from the rear of the living-room, and terminated in a second perpendicular shaft similar to the first. The top of this shaft was in the open pasture on the other side of the wall, and depended for its privacy on the short grasses fringing its tiny entrance.

Thus comfortably established, Hackee and his diminished household — for several of the family had meanwhile settled themselves elsewhere — slipped without further difficulty into the life of their new neighbourhood. The chipmunks being a friendly folk, there was no more hostility shown to the new-comers, who now took their part as a matter of course in the gambols among the dry leaves and in the chattering conversations

which sometimes went on interminably through the long, drowsy afternoons. Nuts were abundant that autumn, so the supplies in the storage galleries increased till there was no fear of a winter scarcity. And to vary the diet there was a neglected apple orchard a little way down the hillside, while big brown locusts and late grasshoppers were still abundant.

But Hackee, having once been singled out by the wild wood Fates for discipline, was not to be suffered to slip into his peaceful winter sleep without further trials. One day two boys and a dog appeared, with apparently nothing better to do than throw stones at chipmunks. In spite of this, the boys, not having guns, were regarded as harmless, it being a poor chipmunk that couldn't dodge a stone. But the dog — that was another matter. Dogs might dig and damage good front doors. There was a general chorus of alarm signals, and most of the chipmunks, including Hackee himself, disappeared into their burrows.

The two boys sat on the wall and began to munch the apples with which their pockets were stuffed. The dog, stumbling by chance

upon Hackee's front door beneath the juniper bush, sniffed at it long and interestedly, and then began to bark. The boys jumped down from the wall and "sicked" him on eagerly. But this dog was not one of the digging tribe. He knew he couldn't be expected to crawl down such a hole as that, so, having no idea what *was* expected of him, he nearly went wild with excitement and anxiety.

Seeing that the dog was not going to dig, the boys conceived the idea of imprisoning Hackee in his own home. It was not exactly cruelty on their part, but rather an impulse toward vague experimenting. Here was a mysterious hole, with something alive in it. What more natural than to try and kill that something, and see what would happen? They got a long stake and jammed it into the hole, while the dog jumped around them, yelping his admiration of their prowess. To their amazement, the stake went down with the greatest ease to a distance of nearly four feet before it stopped with a jerk.

"Gee," remarked one boy, "but that fellow likes a deep hole all right!" And he ground the stake home vigorously.

"S'pose we got him?" queried the other boy, his eyes glued to the stake.

"Of course!" yelped the dog in an ecstasy.

The first boy cautiously pulled up the stake, the dog scrambling in as if he expected the unknown hole-dweller to follow it forth. The boy examined the point of the stake. There was no blood on it. Every one looked disappointed, and the dog drooped his tail in dejection.

"No! Missed him, I guess," decided the boy. "But we'll stop up his hole for him, the beggar!" And he proceeded to drive the stake home once more.

Hackee, meanwhile, filled with curiosity and wrath, had come out by his back door to see what the strangers were up to, and was now sitting on the wall, not a dozen feet away, expressing his feelings with explosive vehemence.

"Darn that chipmunk!" remarked one of the boys, flinging an apple-core at him. "He's making fun of us!"

But in this he was mistaken. For Hackee was not making fun. He was cursing them with all the maledictions in which the lan-

guage of squirrel and chipmunk appears to be so rich.

Of course, it was Hackee's business to dig a new front door without delay. He did, indeed, begin one promptly — from within — as soon as the troublesome visitors were out of sight. But he and the whole household were already beginning to grow a little indolent, in premonition of the long winter's sleep which was soon to come upon them, and after nearly three days the new shaft was yet uncompleted.

Just at this critical moment came the most to be dreaded of all the chipmunk's enemies, and caught Hackee unready. A black snake, alert in the warm noonday sun, and himself on the look-out for winter quarters, chanced upon Hackee's back door there in the open pasture. Being a snake of prompt decisions, he whipped in instantly and made for the central chamber, feeling sure that he would find some of the family at home.

They *were* at home — Hackee and three others. As that dreadful black form, noiseless and lithe and but dimly visible, came gliding into the chamber, Hackee and two of his companions darted criss-cross up and

over the ceiling in a mad whirl of desperation. But the fourth, an inexperienced young female of the season, was unlucky enough to catch the snake's set, malignant eye. She crouched for half a second, paralyzed. Then, recovering herself with a violent effort, she darted down the old tube leading to the closed front shaft. The snake darted after her at once, and as his tail vanished into the tube, Hackee and the others dropped shuddering from the ceiling behind him.

When the unhappy little fugitive reached the foot of the blocked shaft, she turned at bay. At the same instant the snake arrived. Striking before she had time to put up any defence, he drove his long, back-set fangs deep into her muzzle. Being not a venomous snake, but one of the constrictor family, his impulse was to wind her in his coils and crush her to a pulp before devouring her; and therefore he wished to drag her back to the chamber. But though she was dazed by the blow on the nose, she was not completely stunned by it, because her assailant had had no room to strike with effective force. Spreading herself flat, and digging in her claws, she

resisted the snake's efforts to pull her back. Finding the task so difficult, and his appetite unusually insistent, he wasted no more time, but simply began to swallow her, head first, as she was.

It was a slow process, especially in the beginning. But as the victim was engorged, and her breath finally cut off, her struggles ceased; and in two or three minutes her shoulders, too, had vanished down that distended and writhing throat.

Meanwhile, the other two members of the family, convulsed with panic, had fled out and hidden themselves in the crannies of the wall. But Hackee himself, being a veteran of many battles, always courageous, and charged with responsibility as head of the household, had pulled himself quickly together and remained in the burrow. He knew well enough that it was all over with his little companion. He understood the ways of the black snakes also, and he could tell by the sounds that came from the depths of the tube just how this ghastly business of the swallowing progressed. As he listened, his rage grew hotter and hotter, till presently, judging that by this time the

assassin would have the victim so far swallowed as to be incapable of quickly disgorging it, he darted into the tube and bit clean through the snake's backbone just at the base of the tail.

The long, trailing body writhed and lashed, but there in the narrow tube it had no room to coil itself. Hackee raced nimbly along it, heedless of the jamming and buffeting he received, and fell furiously upon the tight-stretched skin at the back of the reptile's head. Flattening himself down upon the body, he clung so tightly that the maddest lashings could not dislodge him, and, of course, the hideously-distended jaw was powerless to seize him. With his keen teeth he bit and bit, now gnawing like a rat, now worrying like a terrier, till presently he succeeded in severing the spinal cord.

The convulsive lashings and twistings dropped to a strong, quivering motion; but for a while Hackee, in his rage, continued to bite and worry his now impotent enemy, till at last, realizing that his victory was complete, he withdrew and ran out into the sun to make his toilet and proclaim his triumph. When he had informed the

whole neighbourhood of it, and even convinced his trembling household, he returned to the burrow, and proceeded to wall up the old tube firmly to a depth of a good eighteen inches, thus securing to a certainty that the entombed slain should cause no more annoyance to chipmunks.

The Leader of the Run

HE was a magnificent fish, by far the finest in the pool — all shining silver and the blue of damascened steel, fine in the head, massive in the shoulder, trim in the base of the tail, broad in the flukes, clean to the last scale, fresh run from the sea.

The pool, deep and spacious, was full of clear amber light; for the river was one of those northern New Brunswick streams whose waters, though of an exquisite transparency, are tinged with the colouring of a brown topaz. Through the centre of the pool swept the current in strong, slow swirls, streaked here and there with fine threads of foam from the wild rapids above. But at either side the water lay tranquilly shimmering over slopes of bright sand.

The splendid fish was not alone, for a good run of his kindred had come up with him from the gulf, and they were all resting

a while in this favoured pool before essaying the long stretch of rapids and heavy water which lay immediately before them. But not one of them could compare with their leader for size, vigour, swift alertness, or the purity of the points of colour underlying the sheen of his iridescent sides.

It was a leased water, this lone and remote branch of the Little North-West; and because it was reputed one of the best salmon streams in the province, the price came high in spite of its remoteness, and much care was given to the protection of it. In spite of wardens and watchmen, however, there were poachers not a few who managed to find their way to the teeming pools. And the salmon, energetic from their long sojourn in the vivifying waters of the sea, and fiery with the urge of spring in their blood, had no care to hide their coming. No sooner had they arrived in the pool than they began to advertise their presence fearlessly, leaping half their length above the surface, flashing an instant all silver in the sun, and falling back with a heavy splash which was nothing less than a summons to all their enemies within remotest earshot.

It was not long before that summons brought a response.

From the foamy mouth of a brook which emptied into the lower part of a pool to the right, emerged a dark, lithe beast of perhaps four feet in length. His long, sinuous, muscular body, with its very short legs and powerful, tapering tail, had much of the fish-like suggestion of the seal. His head was short and heavy-jawed, his eyes luminous and intelligent. Dripping from the foam of the noisy brook, he climbed a sloping rock and poised himself rigid as the rock itself while he watched the pool till he had seen two salmon leap. Then he slipped back into the water as smoothly as if he had been oiled.

The otter was, in fact, as much at home in the water as any fish, except for his need of coming to the surface every now and then to breathe. In the matter of speed, he was able to fairly run down and overtake the slower fish, such as the heavy, pig-like sucker and the fat mud chub; but now it was salmon he wanted, and he knew that, in this case, he must call all his cunning to his aid. Taking advantage of some rocks,

and then a long patch of weeds, he crept up the edge of the pool, making no disturbance in the water, till he was above the cluster of salmon, which lay all with their heads up-stream. Then, singling the one conspicuous fish for his prey, with a sudden, tremendous screw-like motion, he darted into the shoal.

The king salmon, as if warned of his deadly selection, had moved uneasily at the very instant of the otter's rush. He had the inestimable advantage, therefore, of being already started. Almost bending his body double in the violence of his spring, he shot aside, evading the doom. But he did not go quite free. The otter's jaws closed with a snap upon the thick part of his shoulder, just behind the gill-covers. But they caught him slantingly. Had he been a lesser fish, even so they would have held him. But with his great weight, and that all muscle and electric energy, he tore himself free, bearing a great red gash in his side. In a flash he was at the head of the pool, in the white smother at the bottom of the rapid. The otter, too wise to attempt pursuit, doubled back like an eel, and snapped up another

smaller fish which, in its panic, had dashed almost into his jaws.

At first the deeply-wounded salmon left a trail of blood behind him. But, dreadful as was the hurt, it seemed to have no effect upon his vigour, and the icy water quickly checked the drain, astringeing the edges of the cut arteries. At first he was too startled and shocked to choose his course, and drove on upwards, straight through the smother. Here, of course, where the water was creamed with the foam packed down into it, and, therefore, full of air, there was less grip for the thrust of his tail and fins, and much of his power was wasted. In a very few seconds, however, he took hold of his wits again, and chose his way with more discretion.

The rapids were long, steep, and much broken — a succession of diagonal ledges and chutes and sluicing troughs, extending with hardly a break for several miles. To the river-men it was a place for portaging, only passable in canoes, under certain specially favourable conditions, and dreaded as "bad water" at the best of times. The salmon took it where the rush was strongest but least broken — where the solid sweep of the current,

no matter what its velocity, gave him the hold he wanted, the purchase on which to exert his tremendous thrust. In such swimming as this, it must be remembered, his mere fins, in themselves, played a comparatively small part, except the great fins or flukes of his tail. His whole body, being one corded bundle of muscle and nervous energy, became now, for all practical purposes, but an extension of the tail, all screw and engine from flukes to gill-case. If one had been looking down from straight overhead, so as to avoid the baffling reflections of the water, one might have seen him go up, a straight, darting shadow, through the most terrific chutes and sluices without apparent effort.

But it took effort, all the same, for all its appearance of ease. Coming at length — through the pounding thunder, the choking smother of the foam strips, and the dizzying confusion of broken, whirling lights — to a sort of little cauldron under the lip of a ledge in mid-river, he was glad to rest for a while. Here the current was slackened down by the depth of the cauldron and by the meeting of a strong eddy which cancelled a portion of its violence. And here, though the current

was torn and boiling, he was able to find a nook of comparatively slack water, and renew his strength for the next stage. But here also, surrounded by the thunder and the trampling of the mighty currents, certain tiny freshwater parasites had found precarious refuge. They hailed with delight the arrival of the great salmon, and fastened themselves greedily upon the edges of his raw wound. All unaware of their presence, he carried them with him when he pushed out once more into the current and resumed his strenuous journey.

Through the rest of the rapids the great salmon found no more places where he could halt. There was no let-up to the quivering, determined rushes with which he drove his way through roaring trough and rolling chute, till at last, worn and bruised, he gained the reaches of tranquil dead water which formed the next stage of his journey. In the first pool where the bottom was clean — for he hated mud and stranded refuse — he halted, and hung resting, head upstream and fins fanning gently, a few inches above the bright, sandy bottom. And here, in the course of the next hour or so, he was joined

by the majority of his fellows whom he had quitted so abruptly in the lower pool. They were all too tired for play, and they had no inclination to feed, being seldom hungry on their return to fresh water; so they all lay side by side in the quiet pool, as sluggish as so many fat suckers.

That night was still and moonless, with large stars and a blue-black sky reflected in the long reaches of unruffled water. At times a pale winged moth would drop on the glassy surface, and disturb it a little with its feeble fluttering. Presently a big brook trout would rise lazily and suck the insect in with an oily gurgle, or slap it under with a loud, contemptuous flop of the tail before condescending to mouth and swallow it. But the salmon paid no attention either to moths or trout. For some unknown reason — weariness after the ascent of the rapids hardly seemed enough to account for it — it was not their custom to rise or jump while sojourning in this pool; and the salmon seems to be a great stickler for custom.

By and by there came a strange, lurid glare striking down through the water and

illuminating the pool in a confused, distorted fashion. Never before had the salmon seen such a light suffusing the waters, even under the rosiest sunrises of their ocean home. This light was near, and violent, and of a smoky orange, and it threw black, twisting shadows. They all turned their eyes upward, and swam slowly towards it, disquieted but fascinated. Behind the glare, which was moving very slowly upstream, came a long, narrow, dark shape, which at every other second or two made a deep swirl in the water near its hinder end. These fresh-run fish had never before seen a canoe, and in the sea they had learned to distrust all long, dark, moving shapes. But they were too much hypnotized just now by that mysterious glare to have any thought of danger.

In the canoe there were two men, squatters, and incidentally, during the run of the salmon, poachers. Owning — by mere right of occupation, to be sure — two little newly-cleared farms on the bank of the stream near by, they held obstinately that they had a right to all the fish they wanted out of these waters, lease or no lease, Government or no Government. And they held with

equal obstinacy that they had a right to take them in any way they found convenient, law or no law. So, chancing to know that the warden of that section was twenty miles away upstream, they had come out for a little of that strictly prohibited sport, salmon-spearing by torchlight.

The man kneeling in the stern of the canoe wielded his short, broad-bladed maple paddle very subtly, so as not to jar the water by any splashing or concussion. The man in the bow stood behind the flaring torch of rolled birch-bark, his eyes shaded from the glare by the brim of his slouch hat, his knees slightly bent for balance and for readiness, and his long two-pronged salmon spear held poised over the side. It was really more of a fork than a spear, this weapon, the two prongs being of springy ash, and barbed, with a long slender point of steel between them, and so disguised that, when the prongs should be driven down on the victim's back with sufficient strength, they would be forced apart, to enclose and grip the writhing body while the steel transfixed its spine.

Among the fish drawn up to his dazzling lure, the man in the bow marked the great

leader, a foot longer than any of its fellows, and his dark eyes sparkled with eagerness. The spear shaft rose erect in his tense grip, his knees bent, and his whole body assumed the lines of a beast about to spring. The immense fish came almost under the canoe. The spear darted downwards, the man seeming to throw his whole weight upon it, yet without losing his balance or too violently rocking the light craft under his feet. The next instant he recovered himself with a loud grunt, and stood erect, cursing eloquently through clenched teeth, and glaring at his spear as if he would make kindling wood of it. He had missed his stroke, and he the most expert spearsman on the river. He couldn't understand it. His comrade in the stern looked at him with quizzical surprise.

"Best git down to Fredericton, an' buy yerself a pair o' specs, Bill," he suggested amiably.

Bill told him earnestly of another place, where *he* could go to, warmer than Fredericton. And the canoe was allowed to drift away, that the occupants of the pool might get over their alarm and settle down.

The cause of the spearsman's discomfiture

was this. The big salmon was not tranquil, like his companions. He was fretted by his wound, which was sapping his strength. Other greedy parasites had fastened upon it, and they caused a burning fever, which set his nerves all on edge. Attracted by the glare of the torch, he came at it with a restless eagerness. He knew not why, but he wanted it, and he wanted it at once. When he found another fish, as he imagined, barring his way, he flew into a most unsalmonly rage, and darted at the intruder, to root him aside with his horny, projecting lower jaw. That ill-tempered rush it was that saved him, for at that same instant the man in the canoe had made his lunge with the deadly fish-spear. The salmon felt a numbing blow near his tail, where one of the prongs struck him and ploughed another deep gash. Startled, and quite cured of his infatuation for the fatal flame, he tore away upstream, and never paused till he had put several miles between himself and this inexplicable experience.

He felt himself now astonishingly weary, out of all proportion to the short though violent run which he had just made. He did not understand how the old wound, with its

gnawing parasites, and the new wound, with its shock and loss of blood, were draining his forces. But just because his vitality was being so sapped, Nature, ever careful for the continuance of the species, was urging him on all the more fiercely toward the breeding-grounds at the head of the river. Tired though he was, after a few minutes' halt, he continued his journey, leaving the rest of the run as far behind in the feverishness of his haste.

All that night he travelled, and on into the afternoon of the following day, and came at length to the great basin at the foot of the falls. Here, at any other time, he would have halted long enough to thoroughly refresh himself before attempting the difficult leap. These falls were by far the most troublesome obstacle on the whole river — a barrier so effective indeed that none but the most vigorous and dauntless fish of the run ever succeeded in passing it. But the wounded salmon was too driven by the urge of his fevered blood to take any time for recuperation. From the middle of the basin he thrust head and shoulders once above water, as if to reconnoitre the roaring wall of

white and amber before him. Then, with a tremendous rush, he threw himself some eight or ten feet clean into the air, struck the face of the cataract several feet from its crest, and, with that mighty screw-like thrust of tail and body, shot straight on upward through the perpendicular column of water. But he had miscalculated his strength. Under the very lip of the fall, where the downward rush was of clear topaz, and so swift as to seem almost at rest, he faltered. The next instant, he was hurled back and trampled down through the smother to the boiling bottom of the basin.

Half stunned, he made his way to the deep, still water at one side of the pool, and lay quietly under the ledge, seeking to recover his strength. But he could not rest effectually by reason of the ache of his wounds, the fret of the greedy freshwater parasites, and that insistent fever in his blood. When the doom of the wild has once snatched at its prey, and, in part, missed its grip, the unhappy victim seems marked for every stroke of Fate. So, long before the great salmon was sufficiently recovered to properly renew his venture, the sting within him urged him

forth again. Once more he lifted head and shoulders above water, from the centre of the basin, and eyed the cataract through the rainbow spanning it, to assure himself that he had chosen the best path. As he did so, he saw a smaller fish flash up into the sunlight, shine for a moment like a crescent of burnished silver against the creamy front of the fall, take the clear flood of solid amber above the foam with strong precision, and dart triumphantly on over the gleaming lip.

The sight was too much for his prudence. With a splendid rage, he rushed forward to the foot of the fall, and hurled himself into the air through the iridescent quivering of the light and the whipping shreds of the spray.

It was a superb leap, two feet further than he had made in his first attempt, and a good foot beyond the mark of his triumphant predecessor. But, alas, it was a blind leap, and it went untrue because of that wound at the base of his tail. He struck the base of the fall to one side of the amber column, where the sheet of water was too thin and broken to give him any hold. Convulsively

he thrust and lashed, but the treacherous element yielded instead of giving him the firm resistance which he required. He was swept aside, jammed against a projecting horn of rock, and dashed once more to the bottom.

This time he was not half, but completely, stunned. For some seconds, unresisting as a clod, he was rolled over and trampled upon by the falling flood. Then the uprush carried him clear, and he went drifting with the slow swirls, belly upward, across the sunlit basin. Presently he came a little to his senses, righted himself, and with a feeble stroke of his tail made toward the quieter water inshore. Dimly he felt that he must recover himself as quickly as possible for another effort. Dimly the vision of those far spawning-beds of white gravel, bathed with icy springs, kept luring him through the darkness of his stupor.

He should have sought deep water for security; but just now his senses were so gone astray that instinct itself failed him, his doom being upon him. He swam blindly and feebly straight ahead, found the water getting shoal, turned irresolutely, and all at once felt a clutching weight fasten itself

upon his back, and keen teeth burning deep into the base of his brain.

With a mighty convulsion he threw off his assailant, but the effort spent the last of his force. The same convulsion threw him forward into the shallows. With a heavy, splashing flop he lay over on his side, half out of the water, the angry gash in his shoulder turned up to the sun. The next moment his assailant — a slim, dark-brown mink, with pointed muzzle and bright, savage eyes — was upon him again, and tearing at his throat. But he lay quivering, and knew nothing of it.

The mink, presently satisfied that his prey was quite dead, strove to drag the body ashore. Here on the open beach, in the full sun, it was impossible to make his meal with comfort. He did not like being so conspicuously in the public eye. He was a marvel of strength, to be sure, for his size and weight, his lithe body a mere bundle of whipcord muscles. But the dead salmon was heavy. Tugging doggedly, he succeeded in dragging it, by jerks, fairly clear of the water. But to get it up the beach and under the shadow of the bushes was quite beyond his present powers. Wisely he set

himself to the task of reducing its weight, and at the same time refreshing his energy, by eating as much of it as possible, all the while keeping a furtive, malignant eye upon the thickets, lest some bear or lynx should appear to snatch the prize from his jaws.

High overhead, in the unclouded blue, a dark shape was wheeling slowly, peering down upon earth with hard, glassy eyes of black and gold. That slow wheeling on motionless wings came to a stop. The splendid spread of pinion drew together, the gleaming white head and dark wing-elbows pitched grandly forward, and the huge bird dropped from heaven like a wedge. The wind hissed in the tense web of his feathers.

At the sound of that strident hissing, the mink looked up with a snarl of defiance. He made the mistake, for a fraction of a second, of thinking he had to do with a hawk; and in defence of his lawful booty he was prepared, being a dauntless little marauder, to make stand against any hawk. Too late he saw his error. With a cry of rage, he bent himself double and sprang back. But he seemed to spring straight up into the eagle's talons.

Game to the last gasp, he bit vainly into the hard, thick-feathered thigh above him. He got but a mouthful of fluff. Then the talons of steel contracted inexorably, and the life passed out of him with a whimpering gasp. The splendid bird opened his claws and tossed the limp brown body aside, scorning to feed upon such rank and stringy flesh.

With lifted wings he alighted beside the salmon, one foot planted arrogantly upon it in sign that it was his. For a few seconds he stared about him, his piercing, implacable eyes seeming to challenge any one who might care to question his claim to the booty. As no one came, he presently fell to his meal, tearing the delicate flesh with his beak and gulping it in big mouthfuls. From time to time he would raise his beautiful, savage white head, now streaked with blood, and gaze curiously at the sudden silver crescent of some salmon leaping the falls. To him this seemed a useless and inexplicable performance. When he had devoured a good half of the prize, he clutched the remnant in his talons, rose into the air with a laborious flapping, and flew off, over the

white roar of the falls and the dark masses of the hemlock forest beyond, to the lonely granite peak in whose cleft summit he had his eyrie.

With His Back to the Wall

IT was a savage winter, the cruellest he had ever known; and, for a bear, he had known a good many. It had begun early, with frosts that bit to the bone, and cracked the trees surprised with too much sap yet in their branches, and sealed away the moist earth, with its grubs and roots and tubers, under an armour-plating of steel. Then had come storm on storm, with no assuaging of the frost, with hard, dry snow like white sand, which drove blindingly and would not pack, and gathered so deep that even the long-legged, snow-shoe-hoofed moose floundered in it belly deep. Even the depths of the ancient fir forests afforded scant shelter from the fury of the blizzards, whose cold ate its way to the heart of the densest thickets and froze the starving wild-cats in their lairs.

In his amiable and comfortable youth, the great black bear had been wont to keep

in mind his mother's lesson, and "hole up" for the winter. Well stuffed with blueberries and other autumn fruits, with honey, and starchy roots, and all the plump and teeming small fry of late summer, his store of fat had always made him grow drowsy at the approach of the cold, and, in some deep hollow under rock or pine-root, he had curled up to sleep and let the great snows cover him away till spring. But growing restless and morose with age, and more addicted to flesh blood than to the bloodless diet of his youth, he had lost the happy knack of hibernating. While the females and the sleek young males of his kindred were sleeping away the bitter, inimical months of storm, he was roaming the desolation restlessly, wide awake with hunger, hunting with all his craft, and capturing barely enough of the long-legged rabbits to keep an ounce of flesh on his gaunt flanks.

About mid-February, when all the predatory beasts native to the range — bears, lynxes, foxes, fishers, and sables — were already in the grip of famine, there came a rush of ravenous new claimants upon the game. Sweeping down out of the north in packs

came the great grey timber wolves, which for the last half-century had been no more than a tradition in this corner of the world. Since his cubhood the old black bear had never known what it was to be afraid; but now, when he heard that wailing and terrible pack-cry quavering over the snow, under the still moon, his heart quailed. And when, chancing upon the trail of one of the packs, he noted the number of the alien footprints, the hair rose stiffly along his neck with dread and fierce aversion. He felt that he could handle half a dozen at a time of these pale-eyed, ravaging intruders, and therefore he concluded that they would hardly presume to seek a quarrel with himself. But he decided that it would be prudent for him to avoid crossing their trail.

The chosen resort of the bear was a spacious stretch of the fir forest, where the dense coverts favoured his stalking and afforded some poor shelter from the wind. But one day, in savage disgust over the scarcity of anything to stalk, he started out across a reach of barrens to try his luck in the broken country of mixed woods along the fringe of the uplands. The barrens were

flat and open, but dotted with innumerable clumps of bush growth, wherein he felt that he might find grouse squatting, or big snow-shoe rabbits nibbling at the poplar twigs. Far across the open he could make out a black upthrust of rock, with a tumble of boulders trailing off to one side, and toward this he directed his course, with the idea that its recesses might hold some likely den, more impervious to the wind than his fir thickets. If the den should prove to be already occupied, so much the better. That would mean for him a lair and a stocked larder, all in one.

Out across the grey-white levels, under the low arch of blank, whitish sky, he laboured slowly, his black bulk sharply conspicuous as he went. The plains, in their savage, white desolation, had the suggestion of naked granite, their scattered and half-buried thickets showing here and there thin lines and blotches and tips of dark grey. A wide-winged white hawk-owl, swooping low over the drift-wrinkles, followed the trail of a weasel which was itself hungrily trailing a panic-stricken mouse. Hunger, desperation, and the implacable cold possessed the scene.

For some little time, as he moved across the emptiness, the bear had been vaguely conscious of a far-off, wavering pack-cry in his ears. Intent upon his own needs, he had paid no attention to it, beyond vaguely but angrily envying the hunters the quarry that they hunted — a caribou, perhaps, or a giant bull-moose, which would give them a long chase, indeed, but a satisfying meal at the end of it. He plodded on, his hungry eyes searching the snow. At last he came upon the fresh tracks of a rabbit, leading toward a deeply-buried thicket some hundred yards to the right. His faculties sharpened to their utmost, he crouched flat till he was almost out of sight in the deep snow, and began to worm his way noiselessly along the trail. It was amazing how small and inconspicuous he managed to make himself.

But now, his faculties being all at once so keenly awake, he became conscious of an unusual note in that many-throated cry far behind him. It was not quite the same as when the pack followed easy quarry. There was a ring of hate in it, a deadly challenge and defiance. Moreover, it was nearer at hand; it was undoubtedly approaching.

Suddenly the bear stood up straight in his tracks, and with a low growl stared behind him. His heart gave a bound of rage, and then for an instant stood still. It was he himself, this time, that was the quarry.

For several seconds, being a fighter to the last claw, he contemplated holding his ground and giving battle where he was to the insolent invaders of his range. He even glanced around at the thicket wherein the rabbit lay hidden, thinking, perhaps, to capture it and ease his hunger before the wailing pack should come up. But just then he caught sight of the pack emerging from the edge of the fir forest and sweeping down along his trail without an instant's hesitation. What a horde they were! The sight decided him. He would be surrounded, and would have no chance to put up a fight. He turned once more and started at a long, rolling gallop for that upthrust of rock. If he could reach it, he could there find some vantage ground and fight a less uneven battle.

In spite of his bulk and his look of heaviness, the bear's pace was swift. His great strength enabled him to overcome, for a time, the cumbering softness of the snow, which,

indeed, hampered his pursuers as sorely as himself. Gaunt and hard, his wind was good, and his will to gain the rock was invincible. The pack, running now in a grim silence that was more menacing even than their marrow-chilling chorus, came up rapidly, but the start of the fugitive had been sufficient. They were within two score paces of him when he reached the rock.

The face of the rock at this point was perpendicular and absolutely smooth. Even for the bear, an expert climber, there was no such thing as scaling it. But it gave him what he was looking for above all — the guarantee against being overwhelmed from behind. He wheeled like a flash, thrust his back against the rock, rose to a squatting posture of contained readiness, lifted both his armed fore-paws, and faced his pursuers in silence, with lips curled back from his yellow fangs, and his little deep-set eyes flaming blue-green.

The wolves, digging their fore-feet deep into the snow, brought up short at a distance of less than a dozen feet. This was a quarry such as they had never hunted before. They spread themselves out in a half-circle before

him, some prowling restlessly back and forth, some sitting up on their haunches, but all keeping their dreadful eyes centred upon him. Their leader, a little to the front, stood considering; and the bear, swinging his great head slowly from side to side, waited.

II

DREADFUL as was that winter to all the wild kindreds of the forest, to Job Thatch, the trapper, in his half-buried cabin behind the upthrust of rock, its menace, at the first, was of small concern. His cabin was snug, he had abundant firewood stacked about it, and he had "packed" in from the settlements a certain amount of flour, bacon, tea, and molasses, to supplement the fresh meat which his rifle could be counted on to provide him. The growing scarcity of game mattered less to him than to any other foragers of the wilderness, for none of the furred four-footed hunters could compare with him in efficiency at their own craft. In all but the sense of smell, he was a better hunting animal than the best of them. He could hear as well as the listening moose.

He could see as far as the lynx, and with a more discriminating vision. On his snow-shoes he could run lightly and tirelessly when they floundered in the drifts, and with his rifle he could kill at such a distance that the wariest quarry whose trail he followed had no warning of his pursuit till the soft-nose bullet dropped it in its tracks. Recognizing this supremacy, many of the lesser prowlers, in spite of their fear and hate of him, took to following him secretly that they might feast upon the remnants of his kills.

But the price of Job Thatch's confident efficiency was that he never thought to provide himself against ill-chance. He killed for fresh meat only as the need arose, and only such game as came his way while making the daily round of his wide-lying traps. And so, when the ill-chance befell him, laying him up a prisoner in his cabin, he had only the last scant half of a haunch of caribou and a brace of skinny rabbits in his primitive cold storage.

And this was the way in which the sombre powers of the wild, over which he had always imagined himself so securely master, turned

suddenly upon him, and smote him down. While running lightly over the snow along the edge of a gully, a buried sliver caught at his snow-shoe and threw him. With a twisting jerk, he went headlong down the petty steep. As he fell, a pang of horror and anguish went through him, and he heard the bone of his right leg go with a dull, sickening snap.

For a second or two it seemed to him that this was the end. He knew so well just what it meant, for he knew so well the implacable powers of the wild which had thus turned upon him and got him at so hopeless a disadvantage. The shooting anguish for a moment numbed his will, and it seemed to him best to lie where he was and let the deadly cold do its work as quickly as possible. With the temperature at the point where the mercury grows solid in the bulb, it would not be long before the anguish would pass softly and he would slip into the endless sleep.

Then his brain cleared, and the old mastery awoke in his will. The White Death which he had so long and confidently foiled should not fool him and finish him

now. The furred prowlers whom he had hunted and trapped should not now come feasting upon his flesh and pulling his bones apart. By sheer resolve he sent the blood surging once more valiantly through his veins, and laughed out loud, hoarsely, at the anguish in his leg. Then he set himself to drag his way back to the cabin.

First, he had to go directly away from it, seeking the mouth of the ravine, whose steep sides he was quite unable to scale. His snow-shoes he used now on his hands instead of on his feet, beating himself down a track by which to worm his way slowly along. It was a battle, every inch, but his will was unfaltering, his wind like a wolf's, and his muscles as untiring as the corded sinews of a weasel. The frost sank down and closed in upon him in vain, for his struggle kept him in a glow, and the grind of the broken bone at every movement kept stabbing him to a fury of effort. And after seven hours of this gigantic wrestle against death, he gained the door of his cabin, lifted himself on the snow-shoes, as crutches, to pull the latch-string, and fell across the threshold.

Now, for a moment, having won, he stood to lose all. Drunk with exhaustion, he told himself he was safe, and was just falling asleep with the door half open. Had he done so, the fire would soon have died, the White Death would have crept in upon him where he lay, and afterwards would have come the prowlers to the unlooked-for feast. But something cried out a sharp warning in the depths of his brain, and he woke up. He shut the door, piled wood upon the coals in the stove, saw the fire well alight, closed the draught, and then slept for an hour on the floor. When he woke up, he brewed himself a kettle of strong tea, and felt that he was once more master of his fate.

His immediate fear was that, if the broken leg were not set, he would be for the rest of his life a cripple. It was little enough he knew about surgery, but the competent woodsman is nothing if not versatile. Summoning up to his aid every fragment of memory or knowledge or suggestion or hearsay on the subject of broken bones — and he found there were a good many such fragments scattered through his brain — he proceeded to make himself a set of rude splints from

the bark and light wood which he kept for kindling his fire. Then, tying the foot of the broken leg solidly to one post of his bunk, he laid the splints and lashings loosely in place about it, and proceeded to pull the ends of the fracture into place. It took a huge effort. At the agony of it the sweat jumped out upon his grey-white forehead, and the breath hissed between his set teeth. At last, with a nauseating, muffled click, the ends came into place. With iron resolution he tightened the splints and lashed them so there could be no slipping. Then, for a little while, consciousness went from him.

For a week or two the prisoner had nothing more to trouble about than the fierce, shooting pains in his leg-bone, the slow laboriousness of wriggling himself about the cabin without disturbing the splints, and the deadly monotony of this still, restricted life when his veins throbbed with energy. He had all the time there was, and in his horror at the thought of going through life with a useless limb it seemed to him a small thing to occupy two hours in getting four sticks of wood into the stove.

But all the while he had to eat, and he

found his appetite not greatly affected by his strenuous inactivity. When his tiny store of fresh meat was all gone, for a few days he fared well enough on his bacon and flour cakes. Then, with a shock that was almost panic, he realized that his supply of these was shrinking with dreadful rapidity.

Straightway he put himself on strictly limited rations. Then he calculated how many weeks he had provision for. His heart went chasing the thermometer into the depths as he realized that he had not more than enough to keep the life shivering in his body for a matter of three weeks and two or three days. He had no idea how long it would take his leg to get well, but he felt very sure that three weeks and three days would not suffice for the cure.

Here was the Silent Adversary at him again, and this time not with the rush and thrust of assault, but with the slow siege and implacable patience which he recognized as the more dangerous form of attack. He was not daunted, but he began to feel that he had his back to the wall.

It was happy for him that his supply of fuel was practically inexhaustible, for he now

burned it recklessly, lying in the open doorway with his rifle till almost frozen, in the hope of some deer or caribou passing within range. After days of disappointment in this hope, he ventured to writhe himself forth into the snow, and with almost inconceivable labour set a few traps behind the cabin. But, for all his woodcraft, he was unable to quite cover his hopelessly unwieldy trail, and all the wild things, timely warned, made a mock of such futile snares. One rabbit only was his catch in two weeks' trapping, and that he was barely in time to save from the jaws of a hungry wolverine.

Presently it was borne in upon him that there was a special reason, outside the severity of the winter, for this unwonted scarcity of game. Understanding came to him when there was borne to his ears, across the stupendous stillness of the moonlit night, that long, high, quavering chorus which he had not heard since the days when he did his trapping on the Mackenzie. "Timber wolves!" he muttered. And, dragging himself laboriously to the window, he looked out in time to see the pack, running close and well-ordered, sweep by far out on the shining level.

After that he made up his mind that it was wolves he would lie in wait for in his doorway. If he could get a shot at one, and save the carcass from the rest of the pack, he would have something, little to his taste, indeed, but sufficing to keep the life in his veins.

For several days after this resolve, nothing came within sight or sound of the cabin, not even a foraging hawk-owl; and with only three days' scant rations left on his shelves, Job Thatch began to tell himself it was time to take thought for the emergencies that might confront his spirit on the other side of Beyond. Casting up accounts with himself, he came to the conclusion that, as he had never funked in this life, it was not likely he would meet with anything that could make him funk in the next. He further decided that, as in this life he had always done his best to be square in his dealings with his fellow-men, that Unseen Power whom he had half-consciously recognized and reverenced would surely see to it that he got a square deal in the next. A square deal was all that he asked for, and he would rely upon himself to play his hand.

In the midst of these stoical but bracing reflections, he was aroused by the approaching clamour of the wolf-pack. Snatching his rifle, he dragged himself to the door.

There was nothing in sight. The wolves were behind the great rock. In a few seconds his trained ear told him that, though still far off, they were approaching on a course which would take them away along the broken ground to the right, and not bring them within range or even view of the cabin at all.

For a moment he hesitated. The baleful chorus told him that the pack was a very large one, and he himself, dragging a useless and encumbering leg, was hardly in shape to do battle. But his decision was prompt. Better die fighting then die freezing, in any case. He glanced at his rifle — a repeater — to see that the chamber was full, snatched up a belt of cartridges and his axe, and hitched his way eagerly around the shoulder of the rock to a point where he could view the situation.

He saw the huge, gaunt figure of the bear, a hundred yards away, straining toward the rock. He saw the ravening wolf-pack close

behind. His first impulse was to shoot the bear instantly, bear's meat being good. But he knew that, if he did so, he would taste never a shred of that meat, for the wolves would have it out of sight in no time. He noted the numbers of the pack. He noted, far behind, another and larger pack racing up to claim a share of the spoil. He saw what a hopeless venture he had let himself into; and grimly resolving that the price of his life, in wolves, should be a stiff one, he hoisted himself into a niche where he could brace himself upright and have free play, at the last, for his axe.

As he did so, he saw the bear reach the rock, whip round, and grimly face the horde of his pursuers.

"Good for you, old pard!" muttered Thatch. "I'm right glad I didn't shoot!"

III

For some moments the bear sat there on his haunches, eyeing his dreadful adversaries. They were precious moments to him, for they enabled him to recover his wind; but this

the wolves, tireless of sinew and with lungs of leather, never thought of. There was no apparent consultation between them, nor, as far as either the bear or the watcher in the rocks could discern, did any communication pass between the leader and the rest of the pack. Yet all at once, as if on a given signal, the leader hurled himself forward, and the whole pack with him, in silence.

The leader was in front, but he was leader not by virtue of his superior stature and strength alone. His was the superior craft. He knew what must inevitably happen to the first in that encounter. At the last instant he swerved and sank downward. His nearest follower came to the front, and was met by a right-arm cuff from the bear which smashed his head clean back into his shoulders and hurled the lifeless mass clear out over the backs of the pack, where it was straightway seized and torn by those wolves which could not force their way into the fight.

Though the leader of the pack had evaded that fatal stroke, he was no shirker; the leader of a wolf-pack cannot afford to be. At the instant when the stroke was delivered,

he sprang in under the bear's uplifted paw and slashed the tender, exposed flank murderously. With his tremendous length and strength of jaw, it was a savage wound. But the audacity of it was promptly punished. Before he could spring back, his adversary's left descended upon him — a quick, chopping blow with all claws outstretched — and, with a shattered spine, he dropped beneath the feet of his fellows.

As he disappeared, the black bulk of the bear himself also disappeared, literally overflooded by the wave of wolves. But the next instant the wave heaved, broke, and rolled back. Several wolves, with feet in air and bowed backs like puppies, were hurled flying as if from an explosion, and the bear re-emerged, his eyes blazing, his jaws and shoulders streaming with blood not all his own.

"Bully fer you, pardner!" yelled Thatch, forgetting everything in his excitement over so fine a fight.

This enthusiastic encouragement was apparently lost on the bear, whose whole attention was now occupied in beating back, with lightning strokes, the returning surge of his assailants. But the wolves heard it —

the more or less unoccupied prowlers on the fringe of the battle. The narrow green flames of their eyes all turned upon the figure of the man who had shouted. Then they launched themselves upon him, to the number of perhaps twenty. Job Thatch did not take time to count them accurately, for he noted that the second pack was arriving upon the scene.

The rifle began to speak, almost as fast as he could pull the trigger, and the foremost wolves went down. Most of the others, too ravenous to think of anything but the mad craving in their bellies, stopped to feast on the meat thus provided for them, but three kept straight on. One of these was fairly blown from the muzzle of Thatch's gun, but the other two were upon him before he could get them covered. One he dashed aside from the butt with a smashed fore-shoulder, but the other seized him by the leg. It was the broken leg, and Job Thatch laughed, for those terrible fangs wasted their fury on the splints. His axe struck side-ways. A fountain of scarlet followed it, and the wolf fell backward writhing into the hideous scuffle below.

Palpitating from his triumph, Thatch looked across to see how the bear was faring. The battle still went on. Still rose the black but bloodied head, dauntless and furious, over the snapping pack, still thrashed the mighty flails of those ponderous fore-arms. But the new-comers were now sweeping up to the reinforcement of their discouraged kin, and Thatch saw that the fierce old fighter would soon be downed. Snatching up his rifle again, he hurriedly refilled the chamber, and began pumping lead into the new arrivals, the foremost of whom had already halted to devour their wounded kin.

The effect was almost immediate, as far as the bear was concerned. His most pressing assailants, already wavering, were daunted by the sounds of the rifle-shots, and drew off sullenly, lingering, as they went, to tear a mouthful or two from a dying comrade. The bear, suddenly realizing himself victorious, clutched the last of his retiring assailants in a death-grip and fell to biting at him with mingled rage and hunger.

The new arrivals, utterly engrossed in assuaging their famine, did not seem to notice for a few minutes how death was

being dealt among them. But, as their pangs ceased to torment them, they once more became alive to other considerations. One, just nicked by a bullet, yelped and bit at the wound. Then on a sudden all the survivors seemed to take note together of the fact that their fellows were dropping about them, some to instant stillness, some into kicking and writhing paroxysms. Their ears turned towards the shattering rifle-shots; their eyes all stared with sudden fear at the figure of the man erect in his niche. Then their grey, feathered tails curled down between their haunches, they ran quickly together as if herded by a threatening voice, and all swept off along the base of the broken ground, not pausing to look back.

The bear, the fiercest pangs of his hunger satisfied, lifted his gaunt and bleeding head and stared defiantly at Job Thatch. If this was another enemy — well, he was ready for another fight. Thatch slowly lifted his rifle.

"Bear meat's a sight better eatin' than wolf," he muttered.

Then he lowered the weapon again.

"No, old pardner," he continued, speaking

aloud and directly towards the doubtful-looking beast, "that would be a low-down trick to play on ye, seein' as how we've fought shoulder to shoulder, so to speak. An' a right slick fight ye've put up! Here's my best wishes, an' may ye keep clear of my traps!"

The bear, as if uneasy at the sound of the human voice, moved off slowly, dragging one of the dead wolves, and looking for a retreat in the rocks where he could be out of range of the man's disquieting eye. Then Thatch came down from his post of vantage. He picked out three of the youngest and least skinny of the carcases, tied them together by the legs, and started laboriously to drag them to the cabin, planning to come back for more after he had set a dinner on to boil. He felt a little ashamed of his weakness in having let the bear go free, but, after some consideration, he managed to justify himself.

"That bear was nawthin' but a bag o' bones," he murmured. "He was old an' *tough*, an' what there was of him would 'ave been mighty rank eatin'. But young wolf, well boiled, can't be no worse'n dawg!"

He hitched himself slowly into the cabin with his trophies, his grim face aglow with triumph. In his vague but mystical imagination he could perceive the vast, silent, unseen powers of the wild, which had so treacherously conspired against him, drawing back in grave defeat.

King of Beasts

THE water being almost as warm as milk to his naked body, and buoyant by reason of its heavy percentage of salt, Johns felt that he could keep himself afloat in it indefinitely. A swimmer strong and accomplished, he had nothing to do but keep swimming straight ahead, at his leisure, till either he should chance upon land or hunger and thirst should do for him. To be sure, there were other perils — for these tropic waters were the home of shark, sawfish, and killer. But the unpleasant possibility of such an encounter he resolutely dismissed from his calculations, as one of those hazards of the game which he could not hope to affect by taking thought.

The insane fury of the hurricane having blown itself out some hours earlier, before the wallowing hulk which had carried him went down, Johns now found himself in a

comparative quiet. On the crests of the tremendous rollers there was still wind enough to whip off the foam, and to lash him disconcertingly; but in the vast, rocking valleys all was delicious peace. He manœuvred cleverly to keep himself in this peace, while he rested and recovered himself from that strangling struggle in the vortex where the hulk had gone down. From time to time he drove himself head and shoulders above water, glancing about eagerly under the starlight to see if there were any others of the ship's company left alive. But thinking how hardly he himself, with all his strength and watercraft, and his forethought in stripping naked for the final ordeal, had won back to the air out of that appalling vortex, he was not surprised to find himself alone.

At first all his life-energies were absorbed in the effort to recover from that literal and material descent into hell. There was no room in him for emotion — for anything but the purpose to live. Then, as he felt himself swimming strongly, and breathing once more with comfort in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea, and looking up clear-eyed

at the great stars hung low in the velvet sky, a horror of loneliness gripped him. He had touched solitude before, and gently shrunk from it. He had imagined it, magnified a thousandfold, and quailed at the vision. But now, for the first time, he knew it; and for a moment it was as if a gauntlet of ice had cupped itself stealthily under his heart.

It seemed to him that if he had had a plank or a spar, a bit of railing to lay his hand on, or if he had retained some tiniest rag of a garment, the solitude would have been less monstrous. But he was just one naked spark of human life amid the immeasurable, endless succession of the seas, under the still sky. The dead seemed less unfriended, swaying together blindly and silently in those unimaginable depths beneath him.

Most men, in his situation, would have thrown up their arms and gone down, cowed by the thought that they had the whole ocean for adversary. But to give up was not in the breed of this man Johns. It was not even, for the fraction of a second, a conscious impulse. He could not imagine himself giving up a battle, however hopeless,

as long as a single faculty was left him with which to give expression to his will. His doctrine was that the time for a man to give in is not till he's quite dead and knows it.

The question to which he now set his reviving faculties was the direction in which he should swim. The night was still young, the long-battered hulk having gone down about two hours after sunset.

Coolly weighing all the probabilities — a vague enough business, seeing that for two days at least no one on the ship had had any sure notion as to their latitude or longitude — he made up his mind to swim due west. That course seemed to offer him the best hope of making land — a fair enough hope, indeed, whatever direction he might take in this sea of a myriad islands. The prime essential was to take one course and stick to it, lest he should wear out his energies by swimming in a circle. He had the stars to shape his course by; and being a roving journalist by profession, and his head stuffed with diversified, though not always exact, knowledge, he knew his stars well enough for the purpose. His great hope was to make land before full day — before the sun, blazing

down upon him from a sky of brass, should set his brains seething in his unsheltered skull, and drive him mad with thirst. He knew that any land he might hope to reach in these seas was bound to be a land of savage beasts or yet more savage men. But the problem of what he should do on reaching the said land was one that, with all his dogged optimism, did not seem to press for immediate solution. If ever he should be permitted to confront it, he would then give it his best attention.

With a leisurely, strength-conserving stroke Johns swam onward, on his side. As he neared the crest of each long wave, and felt the lash of wind and spindrift, he would put on a spurt, and dive through the topmost smother, in order to regain as soon as possible the comparative quiet of the lower slopes. But the wind, as if satisfied with its accomplishment, was now falling rapidly, and soon even the crests ceased to give him any trouble. The gale fell to a breeze, and then, very gradually, died down altogether, except for an occasional panting puff, like a deep breath drawn sobbingly after a paroxysm of excitement.

As Johns swam on, the dark, heaving surfaces about him fell smooth in oily patches, which broke into swirls of milky, phosphorescent flame, seeded with star-dust, around the surging of his stroke. This intense phosphorescence of the tropic waters was a long familiar sight to him, but now, as he swam, he took note of it more minutely than ever before, merely to occupy his mind. The tiny sparks of sharp, instantaneous light appearing and disappearing in the filmy, eddying glow seemed to him like eyes, derisive and vindictive, taking observation of his course and laughing to think how it would end. Well, he cared little for their mockery, but he would disappoint their malignant expectations. Throughout that interminable night he amused himself with this fancy, till at last the stars began to pale hurriedly, and then the precipitate tropic dawn flared up along the tumbling horizon.

It flared upon a low reef, scourged by breakers, some half-dozen miles away, with a fringe of palms beyond it, and a humped hill, purple-green, crouching a league or so inland.

The man gave a low laugh of exultation,

changed his course to the right, and swam straight for the reef. But he swam very slowly now, husbanding his strength for the final struggle with the breakers.

When, at last, he came within a few hundred yards of the thundering and shattering line of breakers, now hurling their cataracts clean across the reef, he saw that a landing at this point would be impossible, even for an expert surf-rider like himself. But he saw also that the land at this point seemed to be a sort of promontory, thrust out into the sea upon his right. He turned yet again to the right, therefore, and swam on patiently in a line parallel with the roaring surf. After another couple of hours — the sun by this time having turned to molten brass, and forcing him to keep his head continually drenched — he rounded the promontory, and came at length, as he had hoped, to a place where the surf, under the lee of the land, was less unmanageable. Selecting a massive roller, whose breaking point he thought he could calculate, he raced shoreward with its rush, keeping well behind its gathering crest, and dropping back, at the last, to avoid its shattering fall. In its

shuddering collapse his feet found bottom, and, hurling himself forward, he plunged into the lagoon before the next breaker could overtake him.

A mile away, across still waters, lay a white-gold beach, ablaze in the sun, with a shallow rivulet threading its way across it.

Instantly wary, Johns swam slowly toward shore, scanning every tree and mass of jungle for sign of dangerous life. Some parrakeets, chattering and screaming sociably together in the tree-tops near the brook, presently served to assure him that there were no human beings or marauding beasts astir in the immediate neighbourhood. He did not know what to expect in this unknown land — which he suspected to be some island — because he had no means of judging whether it was an outlying member of the New Guinea group or part of the Sumatran system. He knew that if it belonged to the New Guinea group it would have no wild animals more formidable than a pig, except, of course, for the snakes. If, on the other hand, this was an outpost of the Sumatran system, he knew he might expect to find here all the fiercest beasts of the Malay

Peninsula. On the whole, however, he hoped for the latter alternative, for there were no wild animals on the surface of the round green earth which he dreaded as he did the wild men of the New Guinea jungles.

Wading ashore at the mouth of the stream, Johns threw himself down and drank deeply of the sweet and pure though almost tepid water. Then, seeking the nearest shade, he sat down with his back to a tree and his eyes on the thickets, to rest himself and take stock of his chances. He was desperately sleepy after the all-night swim and the days of strain and suspense which had preceded it, but he was unwilling to sleep till he had done some hard thinking. Thinking, however, soon grew impossible. Finding his eyelids dropping together in spite of himself, and fantastic visions chasing through his brain between one eyewink and another, he climbed high into the true, interlaced a couple of neighbouring branches to make him a support, and promptly and heartily fell asleep.

For some hours, through the heavy heat of midday and well on into the afternoon,

he slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion, but was awakened at last by hunger and by the pains of his cramped and intolerable resting-place. He rubbed his stiffened limbs back to life, and then, recognizing that this tree was well suited to be his refuge for the present, being one that he could swing himself into rapidly, he broke off a number of branches and wove himself a fairly secure platform, whereon he spread smaller branches and foliage till he had made a passable bed. This gave him a reassuring animal sense of possession. He had a lair — something standing for a home. Then he clambered to the ground and went looking for something to eat.

He soon saw that the food supply, of sorts, was not going to cause him much worry. He had no more to do than reach out of his own tree into the branches of its next neighbour to have all the ripe mangosteens that he could desire. Not a hundred paces away was a grove of wild plantains. He felt sure he would find the nourishing durian not far off, and plenty of succulent shell-fish in the waters of the lagoon. Having satisfied his hunger

discreetly on mangosteens and plantains, he broke off and trimmed a slender but heavy branch to make himself a club, and then, as naked as the first man who came down out of the tree-tops to challenge the supremacy of his four-footed rivals, he emerged from the shade and strode almost haughtily down the beach to the waterside. Strong and lithe, and in perfect form, instead of being daunted by his utter nakedness and defencelessness, his spirit rose all the more resolutely to meet the perils which he knew must lie before him.

The beach he now observed to be quite liberally strewn with driftwood and wreckage. Among this, after much picking and choosing, he found a fragment with a spike in one end of it, which made a far more effective weapon than his rough branch. Finding it handy and well-balanced, he swept a challenging glance along the dense banks of foliage with all their unknown menace, then set himself to gathering the choicest shell-fish for his supper. He took them up to his tree, and there, sitting with his back against the trunk, he made a hearty meal before climbing to his retreat in the branches.

So far he had seen no sign of life but a

few monkeys, many parrakeets and cockatoos, and a flight of rosy flamingoes. From the unrifled wreckage on the beach, much of it of a character that could not fail to interest any intelligent savages, he concluded that this neighbourhood was not inhabited or frequented by man. If it was the haunt of any of the larger beasts, he felt sure the fact would manifest itself around sunset, when they would probably come down to drink at the sweet-water stream.

For proof of the justice of his reasoning he had not long to wait. While the sunset was yet striking level through the trees, and the sky yet aglow with pale colour, there was a heavy trampling amid the undergrowth, and a herd of wild buffalo came rolling down to the brook. They were some couple of hundred yards upstream from Johns's tree, but near enough for him to recognize their type.

"If those chaps are here," he muttered discontentedly, "I'm in for leopards, and possibly even a tiger or two. I'll have to be keeping my eyes peeled."

And he made up his mind to equip himself, on the morrow, with more weapons,

particularly with something in the way of a lance or spear, that he might do battle at longer range than his club would suffice for. He mused with longing on his repeating rifle and his brace of handy thirty-eights gone down with the ship. From these futile regrets he moderated his dreams to the craving for a good bow and arrows, with which he could soon supply himself if only he had a knife. But this was as vain a dream as that of the rifle and the revolvers. He pulled himself together with a little soundless laugh, squared his shoulders, examined critically his long, sinewy hands and the muscles of his naked body, and thrilling suddenly to the thought that he had got down to the bare bed-rock of unaided manhood, he vowed he would prove himself, against all assailants, a more efficient animal than the best of them.

As the chance of the wilds would have it, he had not long to wait before putting his resolution to the test. The stream rippling beneath the tree, muddied by the visit of the buffalo, had not had more than time to run clear, when a couple of small deer came down to drink at it. Wary of ambush, they

sought its banks in the open, well below Johns's tree, and they drank timorously, lifting their heads alternately every other second to keep watch. For all their vigilance, they could not see the enemy which was stealthily trailing them. It was a slender, vividly-spotted ocelot, which came stealing after them as noiselessly as a shadow, keeping well behind the screen of Johns's tree. Arriving at the base of the trunk, the great cat flattened herself to the ground and peered around cautiously, apparently in doubt as to whether she was near enough to make a successful rush upon the quarry.

Before she could make up her mind, the long vigilant ears of the deer seemed to catch some sound of menace back in the jungle. For just a fraction of a second the two stood rigid, ears, eyes and noses directed toward the sound. Then, with a bound so light that it seemed as if they were lifted by a breath, they cleared the brook and fled away down the beach. The ocelot, baring her long white teeth in her disappointment, darted up into the tree, and peered back over her tracks to see what had given her quarry the alarm. Detecting

nothing, she started to climb higher, as if to secure a better view — and was confronted by the steady eyes of the man, staring down upon her over the edge of his platform.

Shrinking back with a startled snarl, and ears flattened to her skull, she crouched on her branch and glared upwards into the man's eyes. But Johns did not regard an ocelot as worth taking seriously. She was nothing more to him than a superior kind of wild cat. But he did not want her or her kind trespassing upon his tree. "Skat!" he ordered sharply, and clapped his hands. The astonished animal, with tail rigid and enlarged, dropped out of the haunted tree and scurried into the jungle.

"That's good enough for the likes of you," chuckled the man, and set himself to arrange his bed more comfortably.

As the twilight fell swiftly into a starlight dark, Johns became unable to distinguish the forms which sought the waterside. They kept close to the edge of the jungle, nothing more than indeterminate moving shadows, which did little more than touch the water and vanish. But occasional heavy tramplings and splashings revealed to him that some of

the visitors, whatever their character, were of considerable bulk. Once, some little distance back in the jungle, there was an agonized, bleating scream, followed by a brief threshing among the undergrowth, and Johns inferred that some creature of the deer or goat tribe had fallen prey to the ocelot. The sound was followed by an unseen but noisy stampede from the brook-side. Then fell a stillness that was intensified rather than broken by the booming of the surf on the outer reefs.

The warm, sea-scented air was like an opiate bath, and Johns now felt himself overpowered with drowsiness. He began to persuade himself that here on his platform he might safely go to sleep, in spite of all the marauding life now astir throughout the jungle. He knew well enough, at the back of his brain, that it would be madness, but he was just beginning to yield, to slip away into visions, when a honey-coloured light flooding in from sea aroused him. The moon was just rising. He stared out at it, his heart smitten with a sudden sense of infinite and eternal desolation. Then a faint sound behind him caught his ear, and

he turned his head. There by the edge of the stream, his spots clear in the level light, his flat, cruel head uplifted to eye the moon, stood an enormous leopard.

Johns knew that a leopard could climb a tree as nimbly as the ocelot. Without a sound he reached for his little club, and felt the spike in the end of it to see that it was secure. He wished that he had had the forethought to provide himself with a spear. But his spirit rose confidently, and his sinews tightened, to the doubtful encounter that seemed to lie before him.

Presently the leopard began to sniff the air as if he detected a smell that puzzled him. That it was a smell which excited his hostility was plain to be seen from the flattening back of his ears and the twitching of his tail. But apparently this man smell was not familiar to him. He crept about stealthily till he came upon the man's footprints. On the instant he stiffened into vigilant preparedness. Here was something unknown and dangerous. Very circumspectly he followed the trail to the tree, sniffed at the trunk, and lifted his head to stare up among the branches.

The man looked down coolly into that pale, cruel glare.

The tree being now penetrated everywhere by the level rays, Johns knew that his light skin must make him very clearly visible to the foe. He slightly turned his head so that the moon would illuminate his face, and gazed down into the brute's uplifted eyes. Then he began to talk.

"You clear out of this!" he ordered, very slowly, syllable by syllable, in a voice of iron. "You mind your own affairs, and keep your nose out of mine!"

The beast seemed to hesitate. His eyes shifted once or twice, to return instantly to those of the man. That steady, commanding gaze told him clearly enough that here was no trembling prey, but an adversary, ready for him and unafraid. How dangerous an adversary it might be, that pale-coloured being with the unswerving eyes, he was unable to judge. It looked to be as big as himself, and it was certainly of a most remarkable and unheard-of appearance. Then the sounds it was making. They were not loud, but there was an incomprehensible menace in them. Savage and bloodthirsty

as he was, the leopard was not really seeking a fight for its own sake. He was accustomed to seeing panic terror in eyes that met his. It was a victim, not an antagonist, that he was in search of. He recognized, of course, that there *were* creatures more formidable than himself. The tiger, for instance, he gave the widest possible berth to. And to the old bull buffalo he discreetly yielded way if they met in the forest trails. Could it be that this creature in the tree was also his master?

"This is my tree," continued the cold voice above him, slow word by word. "You keep yourself out of it. Get!"

There was a confidence, a decisiveness in the tones that the puzzled beast found very disconcerting. Gradually he seemed to conclude that he had no particular quarrel with this self-assured stranger staring down upon him from the branches. He turned away his head and pretended, for a few seconds, to forget the stranger's existence. Then he wheeled about and went padding off, without haste, into the jungle.

Though Johns thrilled with exultation at this significant victory, he drew a deep

breath of relief when the leopard had vanished. For he knew that, with his slight weapon and his insecure foothold in the tree, the contest, had it been forced upon him, must have been a doubtful one. He realized that he must not let himself sleep, except during full day. He spent the rest of the night devising schemes for making his retreat in the tree more secure, and for equipping himself with more and better weapons. Throughout the night, at intervals, others of the jungle-dwellers came down to the stream to drink, mostly varieties of the deer tribe, a few more buffalo, some small animals which he did not recognize, another ocelot or two, and once again a leopard, or, perhaps, as he concluded, the same one. About sunrise these visits came to an end. Then for a couple of hours he slept heavily.

He awoke with a start, and a conviction that the leopard was climbing the tree to attack him. He gripped his club and leaned over the edge of his platform, wide awake and ready for the battle. But there was nothing in sight more threatening than a big rose-crested cockatoo, which hung head downward from a neighbouring branch,

erected its gorgeous top-knot, and eyed him with a kind of solemn malevolence. He burst into laughter, and the bird flew off with an outraged squawk. Then Johns swung down alertly out of his tree, took a plunge in the salt sparkle of the lagoon, and set himself to his breakfast of plantains and mangosteens. He was content to dispense with the shell-fish for the present, promising himself that he would tackle the problem of making fire by friction after he had dealt with the more pressing ones of weapons and safe lodging.

After a deal of searching the drift-wood down the beach, he found a strip of light hand-rail attached to a support. In wrenching it free, which proved a laborious task, and bade fair to drown him in his own sweat, he split the end of it to a sharp and jagged point. He recognized the wood for a piece of ash, hard-grained and not too brittle; and he was satisfied that here was a fairly effective javelin with which to stab downward upon an enemy striving to climb to his platform. But searching all the morning, with a thatch of wet leaves on head and shoulders, failed to show him a club so

effective as the one which he already carried. With its heavy iron spike projecting on one side of the head to form a picking beak, it had little fault but its lightness. He decided that he would have to compensate for that by putting the more muscle into his stroke.

Intent upon his search, Johns had for a time forgotten the possible perils lurking behind the green jungle wall along the top of the beach. Suddenly a heavy, grunting breath, close behind him, made him whip about with a sensation of the hair rising on his scalp.

Not more than a dozen paces away stood an old bull buffalo, eyeing him malignly.

Johns recovered himself on the instant. It was the mysteriousness of the sound that had startled him. The moment he understood it his nerves came back to hand. Knowing himself quick on his feet, he felt certain that he could dodge the brute's charge, and escape him, if necessary, by plunging into the lagoon. But he did not want to run away, if he could avoid it. He stood his ground, poised and ready, and met the beast's stare calmly.

At first the bull seemed inclined to attack,

as if resenting the man's mere presence. He pawed the sand, angry but irresolute. He snorted, and took a couple of steps nearer. But the man's utter immobility, together with his calm gaze, seemed to act upon the great animal like a cooling douche. His angry tail began to droop. He glanced aside as if remembering an appointment. And, finally, after a sullen rumbling in his throat, he turned away and lumbered off toward the stream. Once or twice he paused and looked back defiantly, as if he half expected the man to pursue him. But Johns remained where he was, leaning on his lance, till the buffalo had wallowed across to the opposite bank. Then, muttering to himself, "I'd better be getting another forty winks, if I'm going to keep awake all night," he betook himself to his tree, and went up into the branches as lightly and neatly as a chimpanzee.

Having slept heavily through the midday heat, Johns devoted the rest of the daylight to strengthening his position. He lugged up into the tree a number of suitable fragments of wreckage, with a lot of long, trailing fragments of a tough-fibred wild vine.

Using the vine as lashing, he constructed a fairly solid platform, with a raised edge to keep him from falling off in his sleep. Here he felt that he could be comfortable enough, for a castaway, if the leopards would leave him alone. If they wouldn't, he thought that he could now manage to give them a salutary lesson.

Just before sunset he brought a big bunch of plantains up into the tree, with a bit of dry spruce which he had found among the wreckage, and half-a-dozen hard, sharp-edged shells. He proposed to occupy his enforced vigil with the business of scraping a store of fine, fluffy fibre, to serve as tinder when he should undertake to start a fire. But he was not to enjoy any such quietly domestic evening as he anticipated. He had not yet sounded the capacities of the jungle.

From far back in the forest came a heavy roar which sent a thrill of apprehension down his spine. It was such an utterance as no leopard was capable of. He knew at once that only a lion or a tiger could so proclaim himself. This was not the latitude or longitude for lions. What could he do, with his poor weapons, against a tiger? For

a few minutes his heart went down to where his boots would have been had he had any; and he saw himself going hourly in trembling watchfulness, ready on the instant to flee into his tree-top like a frightened monkey. Then, like a flood of warmth through all his veins, came surging back his old faith in man as the master animal. He himself, he told himself, all solitary and naked and an alien in the land, was nevertheless lord of all these brutes, supreme so long as will and courage failed him not. He had read how naked savages, in several lost corners of earth, were wont to hunt the tiger or the jaguar, alone and with no weapon but a sharpened stake. He would teach the tiger, when the time came, to give way before him even as the leopard and the buffalo had done. In the dusk he sat scraping with a shell at his jagged lance-tip, till the hard point was almost needle fine.

After that roar there had been no more sounds of visitors coming down through the dusk to drink at the stream. The long silence grew ominous, and the man found himself straining his ears so intently that he began to imagine sounds that did not

exist. He thought he heard heavy, padded footsteps under his tree, but peering down he was able to see clearly that there was nothing there.

At last the moon rose. It was no more than half-way above the sea-line — a red, distorted, swollen segment of a disc — when some hundred yards away the tiger emerged from the thickets, walking straight down into the eye of it. It was evident that he had some inkling of the man's presence, for he sniffed with menacing inquiry and came on straight toward the tree.

Johns was assured that tigers, in general, were not given to tree-climbing. He also knew that many wild beasts, at a pinch, would defy the accepted dicta of natural history. He was ready, however, to back his own alertness among the branches against that of any tiger. When the striped and venomous-looking brute came under the tree, and lifted dreadful eyes to his, he cursed him scornfully and threw down a stick of driftwood.

As luck would have it, the missile caught the tiger fair across the muzzle. He snarled with surprise and rage, drew back, crouched,

and launched himself in a magnificent spring for the lowermost branch, where it jutted out at right angles to the main trunk. He made good his hold with his great forepaws in the crotch, and hung there for a second or two, clawing with his hinder-paws at the trunk below, before he could draw himself fully up.

This was just what Johns had hoped and planned for; and he was ready, lying outstretched on his platform, spear in hand. Jabbing downward sharply, but not too heavily — for fear of breaking his point — he struck the beast in the face twice, and slashed him straight across one eye, quite destroying it. The tiger roared with pain, got one hind-paw up on to the branch, and stretched his head far aside to avoid the stabbing strokes at his face. This attitude exposed his neck and throat.

And now, risking his point, the man stabbed savagely. The point went true, entering just behind the brute's jaw; and with all the strength of both arms the man drove his stroke home. The harsh-edged ash tore its way clean through; and with a choked screech the tiger, stiffening

backwards convulsively, fell to the ground, carrying the spear with him. For a time he whirled himself around and around, clawing and coughing, and blowing out great clots of bloody froth. Then at last he sank down, and lay still.

"Curse him, he's broken my spear!" grumbled Johns, dissembling the exultation which swelled his heart. Then, rightly arguing that the presence of that dread form beneath the tree would effectually discourage other visitors, he settled himself to sleep.

Next day Johns was in doubt, for a time, what to do with the tiger's body. He longed to skin it, that he might dry the hide in the sun and keep it for a trophy and a couch. But with no skinning knife except a shell, he shrank from the task. Finally he decided that the dead beast should serve as an object-lesson, a notice to all the wilderness marauders that the dweller in the tree was not to be trifled with. He dragged the body several hundred yards down the wind, and left it on the beach, some yards out from the jungle edge, where all eyes might consider it carefully. He felt confident that

word of the tiger-slayer would spread quickly through the forest, and he would be no more troubled.

In this conclusion Johns was doubtless right, for among the wild kindreds no less than among men is prestige a potent influence. He had proved himself master of the monarch of the jungle, therefore he himself was monarch. Even the elephant, sagacious and a respecter of jungle law, would have avoided trespassing on the masterful tree-dweller's range. But Johns's luck was following him, and he was not to be put to the test of exercising for long the sovereignty which he had so swiftly established.

On the second day after the affair with the tiger a Dutch trading schooner hove to under the lee of the promontory, just outside the reef, and sent a boat ashore for water, the quality of Johns's stream being known to certain craft in the island trade. A mile or two further down the reef was a narrow entrance feasible for a long-boat or a cutter, and Johns soon found himself celebrating his happy abdication, in trousers a thought too broad in the beam for his build, and a glass of pungent schnapps. His story for a

moment taxed the faith of his sturdy rescuers, but an examination of the dead beast's carcase, with the improvised spear through its throat, proved convincing evidence; and Johns was able to carry his prestige with him to the polished decks of the schooner. It was a light luggage, but one precious in his eyes.

In the World of the Ghost-lights

AT that tremendous depth, half a mile straight down from the windy green-and-purple and the cream-white racing foam of the ocean surface, such a thing as the light of day was never even guessed at. The strange dwellers in those deeps could never mount far toward the sunlit tides and live to know about it; for in passing upward from the terrific pressures under which they had their existence, their framework would be fatally distorted, or their stomachs would turn inside out, or their eyes would bulge from the sockets, or their frail tissues fall apart. So they passed their lives with no knowledge or suspicion of the sun, in a quiet which the maddest hurricane could never hope to jar.

Yet these deeps were not plunged in an utter and eternal darkness. Here and there a floating colony of tiny beings, infusoria,

akin to those which illuminate the surface seas at night, made a patch of nebulous glimmer. Here and there a faint, elusive pallor, fading every other moment to extinction and reviving as if softly breathed upon, came from spreading groups of those curious plant-like creatures known as sea-lilies. And the broad undulations of the silt-strewn ocean floor gave forth an attenuated phosphorescence which made them not utterly invisible. For eyes sufficiently sensitive, therefore, to grasp its feeble vibrations, there was something approaching a spectral twilight, at least in spots, over the deep-sea bed.

Besides this diffused glimmer, which seemed ever ready to die of sheer faintness, from time to time what seemed like a cluster of glow-worms would flash softly into view under some ledge or some cluster of lilies, to be extinguished, usually, a moment later. Very often a pair of tiny lamps, so to speak, of bluish or violet flame would be waved delicately to this side and that, as if the unseen bearer were seeking something in the mystic gloom. On every side pale wisps and eyes of light would appear and dart and vanish. And sometimes what looked like

the spectre of a fish, with two long streamers of light trailing back from its nose, its fins outlined in vaporous radiance and a double row of softly-glowing spots down its sides, would go darting across the obscurity. Perhaps it would be followed by a larger shape, ghost-pale, with an enormous head and long, wavering body, and would plunge for refuge in among the tough foot-stalks of the sea-lilies. In one way or another, in one phantasmal form or another, the ghost-lights flickered everywhere throughout this soundless gloom.

In one spot, some two feet above what looked like an immense flat stone, hung a tiny tuft of violet flame. From the core of tender light floated a sort of down, an aureole of faintly luminous filaments. From this soft radiance it could be made out that the flame flower was hung from the tip of a slender, reed-like support, which swayed lightly from time to time, although there was no disturbance in the surrounding water. The supporting reed appeared to grow out of one end of the flat rock, whose blackish hue melted into the shadow undulations of the surrounding silt. The beautiful little flame

sometimes trembled, sometimes nodded on its support, sometimes faded almost to invisibility only to burst into a brighter glow, and altogether conducted itself with a caprice for which no cause or reason was apparent.

Presently one of those ghost-like fish forms, with the double row of glow-worm points down its sides, and enormous whitish eyes, caught sight of the trembling flame and sailed up to investigate it. The visitor was small — not more than a foot in length — and therefore seemed to exercise a becoming discretion. As he drew near, however, it appeared to him that the little violet light was something not only good to eat, but safe to appropriate. He hurried, lest some other hungry wayfarer should forestall him. Except for his curious illuminations, he looked quite like an ordinary fish of the upper waters; but as he darted up to the wisp of flame, he opened an amazing spread of jaw. In fact, his mouth was cut back to the very base of his long head.

The little flame, as if it had eyes of its own, slipped aside and dipped fairly to the floor, skilfully eluding the attack. And in

the same instant an amazing thing happened. The flat black stone which had been supporting the flame heaved upwards and opened. The opening was a cavern, set about with long teeth, all slanting inwards. The darting ghost-fish was engulfed. The cavern closed with a snap, and on either side of where it had been, glimmered lambently two pale, cold, death-like eyes. Their phosphorescence lasted but for a second or two. Then the black stone looked as inanimately slab-like as before, the eyes becoming mere dull excrescences; and the little violet flame, slowly rising, once more trembled and nodded invitingly above it.

Suddenly the flame went out, dead out. A series of massive concussions had disturbed the heavy water. All the other definite lights in the neighbourhood — the glow-worm clusters, the gliding points and stars, the sliding eyes and spectral streamers, and even the pallid display of the imperturbable sea-lilies — extinguished themselves abruptly, and there was nothing to be seen but the nebulous patches of the infusoria and the elusive glimmer of the ooze-beds. Somewhere in the obscurity, too far off to be

visible, but near enough to make itself startlingly felt, a battle of monsters was going on. For all lesser beings of the underworld it was a case of "Lights out and lie hid!" Even that great stone slab of a creature, though some seven or eight feet long and a good two feet across at the place where the cavernous mouth had opened, had no wish to attract the notice of those fighters. He kept his dainty violet lure safely concealed, and was content to be the most unconsidered of rock slabs that ever gathered silt on the ocean bottom.

Presently the disturbance died away, and once more the water lay in heavy stillness. The first of the deep-sea dwellers to recover confidence were the sea-lilies, which slowly relit the glow in their pale lilac and pinkish petals. The glow was an irresistible attraction to all sorts of tiny living organisms, which swam or floated towards it, to be captured by the carnivorous, ever-hungry blooms. Then other cautious beings began to let their ghost-lights glimmer again as they resumed their prowling, their swimming, or their crawling — fish, shrimps, star-fish, crabs, monstrous sea-urchins, and huge black-purple

trepangs. And, last of all, that monstrous lier-in-wait, the deep-sea angler, hung out once more the lovely violet death-lamp above the hidden cavern of his jaws.

These spectral deeps were not by any means lonely — at least, not in this particular section of them. Mysterious, busy, almost invisible life swarmed everywhere, hunting and being hunted. But for a few moments nothing more came near the fluttering lure. The monster grew impatient. His appetite was huge, and he lived only to satisfy it. But as, with all his strength, he had no speed for the pursuit and capture of his prey, there was nothing for him to do but wait, sinking ever deeper into the silt to make his ambush the more secure. The only sign of his impatience was an added activity and persuasiveness in the noddings and wavings of the little violet flame on its slender tentacle.

And presently its activity was rewarded. It caught the notice of a most grotesque-looking, crab-like creature, with a small, circular, rose-coloured body mounted on immensely long, jointed, stilt-like stalks of legs. Its jaws were almost as big as its

body, and it waved from its head two slim, whip-like antennæ, or feelers, even more ludicrously elongated than its legs. It may have been by some delicate perception in these feelers that it noticed the trembling violet light; for where its eyes should have been were merely two pin-points of black, a mere rudimentary suggestion of what may have been eyes in some remote shoal-water ancestor. However that may be, the stork-like crab certainly perceived the lure. He came sidling towards it awkwardly but swiftly, his great jaws working with eagerness.

But another prowler had also caught sight of the enticing wisp of violet. An immense scarlet shrimp, as big as a lobster, came swimming at it backwards. *He* could see well enough, having a pair of extravagantly large eyes, each with a bright white bull's-eye lamp glowing beside it. He saw not only the lure, but the sidling approach of his long-legged rival, and he shot down in jealous haste. The two arrived together. The little flame eluded their rush and sank. They followed, clashing against each other, and plunged into a black cavern which

opened and rose to meet them. The cavern gave a sucking gulp and closed again with a snap. For a second or two those veiled, pale eyes on either side of it glowed faintly green, and then were extinguished again. And once more the little violet flame lifted its lure above the silted slab.

The next passer-by to heed the flame was so formidable-looking that one would have thought the lier-in-wait would take alarm and withdraw the lure. It was an immense serpentine "oar-fish," a good eighteen feet in length, with two long, slender fins, like a pair of oars, spreading from the sides of its head. Its body was extraordinarily slender for its length, being little more than a foot in diameter, and carried a back fin running all the way from the tail to the top of the head. At the top of the head this fin was enlarged by several huge spines, perhaps two feet long, which slanted forward imposingly and threateningly over the owner's snout. The body was silvery in hue, and carried a uniform faint-green phosphorescence.

In a leisurely fashion the oar-fish swam up toward the quivering violet lure. Formidable as he looked, it awaited his approach.

At last he lunged at it, opening a smallish and not very dangerous mouth as he did so. The lure, of course, vanished. The cavern yawned beneath him, lurched upwards, and closed upon his body just behind the gill covers.

For a few moments the long tail lashed the water desperately, till all the surrounding lights were extinguished in terror. But the captive, for all his length and strength, was utterly helpless in the grip of those terrific jaws and long, rending fangs. In a very few seconds he was bitten clean in two, and the head, with its protecting spines, rolled to one side. The broad, ungainly figure of the angler flopped clear of the silt and snapped voraciously at the quivering body, biting off two-foot lengths of it and gulping them almost without effort. His stomach swelled and swelled, but he kept cramming the banquet down, till not more than three or four feet of the tail end of the victim remained. Then he settled back into his lair, fanned his fins cleverly till his swollen form was once more veiled in silt, and proceeded to digest his gigantic meal. Having no more use for food at the moment, he

refrained from hanging out the violet lure.

As soon as the turmoil had subsided, and the ghost-lights had begun to reappear, the news went about in some strange way that a feast was spread beside the big stone. In a very few minutes the two remaining fragments of the dead oar-fish — the tail and the armoured head — were centres of voracious, struggling life and of a strange confusion of lights. Blood-red, deep-sea crayfish, monstrous and distorted crabs, fish that were all head and jaws, with long, whip-like tails, fish that were all stomach and rending, parrot-like beak, creatures that were eyeless, but with long, groping antennæ, and creatures whose immense staring eyes were out of all proportion to their bodies, tore frantically at the two unresisting lumps of flesh, or at each other if that seemed more convenient. Their tinted lights crossed and interwove, till each fragment of the victim was a mass of writhing, pulsating glow.

As all these furious banqueters were of more or less insignificant size — the biggest of the fish forms not being much more than a foot in length — there was, for a time, no wholesale calamity among the feasters. But

at last three curious-looking strangers came sailing up to see what was going on. They were black, short-bodied fish, about two feet in length, with an ungainly, drooping pouch to their bellies, heads almost half the length of their bodies, and mouths cut back to the gills. They swam up without haste, took in the situation, and opened their mouths.

So wide were these amazing mouths of theirs, that their own bodies might have been easily pulled through them by the tails. The creatures themselves became insignificant beside those gaping traps.

The visitors began to feed, but with no great haste. It was just a matter of scooping in and gulping down violently the pre-occupied victims. Once between those jaws, there was only one way to go, for the jaws were lined with long, sharp teeth, all pointing inward to the capacious and slippery gullet. Fish, shrimps, crabs, they were all scooped in impartially and vehemently gulped down into the huge, elastic stomachs, where they writhed together in a packed mass till the swift corrosion of the powerful digestive juices stilled them. In a very few minutes each of the three strangers carried beneath

him a stomach much larger than all the rest of his organism put together. Then, heavily and reluctantly, they sailed off to seek the seclusion of some deep anemone thicket where they might digest in peace. And the scant remnants of the feasters went on with their banquet as if nothing whatever had happened to damp the revelry.

In the stomachs of these deep-sea dwellers, digestion is a process which goes on with appalling rapidity. After an hour or two of quiescence, the swollen body of the gorged lier-in-wait had subsided to something almost approaching his normal flatness. With this subsidence his appetite reawoke, and suddenly there was the little, fluffy violet flame once more nodding and quivering on the bent tip of its tentacle above the silted slab.

This time it had not long to wait, for the success of the late banquet had made this once-neglected spot a popular corner of the world. An incredibly monstrous and fantastic shape came swimming slowly past. With huge, blank eyes it took note of the violet lure, and turned to investigate it.

The new arrival, obscurely visible in its

own green-silvery illumination, was a sort of double-decker in appearance. About five feet in length, its head and the hinder third of its body were not unlike those of an immensely fat and large-mouthed eel. It was, indeed, a peculiarly distorted member of the eel family. Its distortion was a matter of its stomach, which, distended till its membranes were almost as transparent as glass, hung longitudinally below its body in something the shape of a dirigible balloon. Into this amazing receptacle was neatly packed, lengthwise, a stout blackish fish of not less than two feet and a half in length, together with a mass of little vermilion shrimps.

Even with this enormous mawful, however, the fantastic creature had still a lively appetite. Possibly he thought the beautiful little violet light would serve as a piquant digestive. He opened his jaws wide and sailed up to take it in. Its glow was almost tickling the tip of his lower jaw before it whirled lightly aside and eluded him. At the same time that pendulous cylinder of his gorged stomach almost grazed the rock below. The rock opened and

lazily, without effort, absorbed it, with all its half-digested contents. The rock-like jaws closed implacably, and with a convulsive lashing of its tail, the swimmer, reduced now to something like the normal proportions of an eel, darted away, leaving a ghastly trail of blood and phosphorescence behind it. For several minutes it tore along in a blind circle, heedless no less of enemies than of victims for which it could have no further use. Then, having no longer anything to live for, it turned on its side and sank to the bottom, to be seized upon, before its squirmings were still, by a colony of fantastic little lemon-yellow crabs without eyes.

The yellow crabs would have had a varied and numerous assortment of uninvited guests to their banquet within the next five minutes, but that something now turned all attention toward the upper waters. Directly overhead a bulky glow appeared, enlarging and brightening as it descended. As it drew nearer, the pale-greenish glow was seen to be shot with darting lights of white and yellow, blue and lilac. Then it resolved itself into a turning mass of furiously struggling life. At last it settled slowly

upon the colony of sea-lilies, and revealed itself as the almost naked skeleton of a whale, swarming inside and out with every species of deep-sea scavenger. No wonder the little lemon-yellow crabs were left to finish their insignificant meal in peace.

The whale was one which had been harpooned at the surface by the whale-fishers, stripped of its blubber, and cast loose. As the red carcase sank, first the hordes of sharks had flung themselves upon it ravenously, rending away the flesh in huge triangular masses. When it reached a depth where the sharks could no longer endure the pressure, the gigantic framework was almost bare. The sharks were succeeded, in ever-increasing numbers, by the myriad voracious inhabitants of the depths, of every family and kind except the crawling echinoderms and crustaceans, which could not travel far from the bottom, and of every size, from terrible pike-like creatures twelve and fifteen feet long, whose fanged jaws might teach prudence to the mightiest of the sharks, down to little, black, purse-like fish not bigger than one's hand, all jaws and stomach, without fin-power to tear off the juicy

morsels into which they had sunk their ravening teeth. During the slow, revolving descent of the great structure — growing ever slower as the pressure increased — the smaller forms kept as far as possible on the inside of the framework, more or less out of the way of their larger and more voracious fellow-banqueters. But whether outside or within the skeleton, the feast was an incessant and implacable warfare, the guests devouring each other with a large and frank impartiality.

As soon as the skeleton with its seething glow had settled upon the bed of sea-lilies, then all the crawlers from a mile about — crayfish and shrimps, crabs and stars, mostly eyeless, but all armed with long antennæ of marvellous delicacy — came thronging up for their share. The giant carcase fairly boiled with light and strife. In the course of an hour the bones were picked so clean that there was nothing left except for those tiny creatures armed with drills in their heads, which could bore into the solid bone and suck its juices. Then little by little the revellers dropped away, either gorged themselves or helping to gorge their bigger

fellows; and the lights began to fade from the great arching ribs and cavernous skull of the skeleton.

During all this time the lier-in-wait, whose place of ambush was perhaps fifty feet distant from the bed of sea-lilies, had not been faring altogether to his own satisfaction. It was contrary to all his methods to emerge from the silt and flop over to take a hand in the great scramble. All he could do was to hang out his wavering violet lamp and try to tempt some of the discontented outsiders from the feast. A few small fry were caught in this way, but not more than enough to excite him. In his excitement he allowed his terrible veiled eyes to emit a pallid glimmer, as they rolled about in the search for likely prey, while the violet lure fairly danced up and down in its desire to please.

All at once, however, those glimmering eyes detected something which made their light fade in an instant and the violet flame go out as if clapped under an extinguisher. With a stealthy side movement, the lier-in-wait sank himself deeper into the silt. He had seen a long, sickly-white, twisting feeler

— yards and yards of it — sliding over the ribs of the skeleton. It was followed by several more, equally inquisitive. But the lier-in-wait had not stopped to look at them. He wanted as much silt over him as possible, even over his eyes, as long as those python-like feelers were investigating in that neighbourhood.

It chanced that one of those colossal white squid, or deep-sea devil-fish, which herded by the hundred on a congenial slope some miles away, had strayed beyond his customary limits. He had probably been stirred up and terrified and set to wandering by the attack of some troop of sperm-whales. His vast, all-embracing eyes had caught sight of that luminous descent of the carcase, and he had come to see what was going on. His progress had been slow, because, unless in case of special urgency, he travels by dragging his unwieldy bulk along the bottom, instead of swimming backwards, like the little squid of the surface waters. By the time he reached the scene, therefore, there was nothing left of the feast to console his raging appetite.

This white and sluggish wanderer was by

no means one of the largest of his awful kind. Yet the sprawling sac of his body, with the squat, parrot-beaked head, was little under forty feet in length, while the ten writhing tentacles, each as thick at the base as a man's thigh, which sprouted in a bunch from the head like leaf-stalks from the crown of a carrot, added another twenty feet. The tentacles, which were armed all along their under-sides with powerful suction discs, were as sensitive, especially toward the tips, as a delicate finger; and they were all ceaselessly in motion, with a stealthy, questing, writhing movement, like so many pale and hungry snakes. But the most thoroughly nightmareish feature about the whole unspeakable monster was the eyes. They were two vast concave lenses of inky blackness, bulging, and so high that their upper rims almost met at the top of the head. Absolutely lidless, utterly immobile, and of an unfathomable malignancy, they looked as if nothing could be hidden from their awful gaze.

All over the naked bones of the giant skeleton those ghastly tentacles went groping, picking off every tiny creature which still

clung there, and conveying the paltry spoil down to the horrid, gnashing beak. A few fish which had been imprudent enough to linger about the scene were pounced upon with a dreadful precision and swiftness; and some crabs and crayfish which were trying to hide among the crushed wrecks of the sea-lilies found themselves snatched up and thrust into the parrot beak. But such small fry merely served as appetisers. In a rage, the pale monster dragged himself completely up on to the top of the skeleton, perched there for a few moments, sprawling all over it, and then let himself down clumsily on the other side. His inescapable gaze had detected something unusual in that neighbouring rock-slab. Promptly two twisting feelers travelled over to investigate. On the instant they took hold, with a grip which bit deep into the hider's leathery flesh.

The lier-in-wait, finding himself thus discovered and hopeless of escape, instead of collapsing in a panic, flew into a despairing rage. He was of a grim and battling breed. His eyes burst into green flames, and his cavernous jaws snapped madly. The spread of those jaws was not much under a couple

of feet. They caught a tentacle where it was four or five inches thick, and, tough though it was, shore it through without an effort. But in the same moment four more tentacles secured a hold upon his body — such a hold that, double and spring and snap as he might, he was quite unable to inflict any further punishment on his captor. Then, not swiftly but inexorably, he was lifted from his lair and dragged down into the squirming nest of tentacles. Those vast, inky eyes glared at him without expression. Then the parrot beak opened wide, and the lier-in-wait, crammed into it head first, was swallowed in one long, strangling gulp.

Contented for the moment with this fairly substantial meal, the white monster backed his unprotected body up against and partly into the skeleton of the whale. Then, curling his tentacles carelessly in front of him, he appeared to go to sleep with eyes open. Upon the return of quiet, the glow-worm clusters relit themselves, with the crawling stars of rose or green, and all the darting, interweaving, half-indistinguishable ghost-lights, trailing phosphorescence through the heavy water. Only the beautiful,

filmy, delicate flame of violet nodded and coaxed no more above its anchoring slab there in the deep, five hundred fathoms down.

The Moose that Knocked at the Door

CHAPTER I

WHEN the snow stopped, and the wind, Carson's clearing was buried to the tops of the fence stakes. The old one-storey frame house — with its long shed, and then the low barn set at right angles to the shed so as to form a letter L — was buried nearly to the tops of the windows. The roofs, swept clean by the wind, showed black against the surrounding whiteness. In spite of the fact that the two days' storm was over and the sun was once more shining, the sky was still of a hazy pallor as if it held yet more snow to let drop upon the burdened world; and the sunlight had no sparkle. Along one side of the clearing the snow was heaped in huge drifts, and the fir trees towered above it in black ranks, shaken clean; while along the other side, under shelter of the forest, all the

trees were shrouded in white, their laden branches drooping to the ground.

But however dead and desolate the world outside, there was cheer within the house. the main room, which was at once living-room, hall and kitchen, was darkened to a curious twilight by the drifts of snow that veiled the window panes, but the effect was merely to shut out the outer loneliness and cold. A generous fire of seasoned birch and maple roared in the big kitchen stove, from whose wide-open "draft" a red glow spread across the room, flashing on the polished tins which hung along the opposite wall and gleaming capriciously from the white dishes and old blue china platters which lined the shelves of the spacious dresser.

At one end of the long deal table places were set for two, it being now nearly noon, the dinner hour in the backwoods. At the other end of the table Mrs. Carson — a large, bony woman with dark hair drawn back uncompromisingly from a kindly but irascible red face — stood "kneading up" the tray of dough for her week's baking. As soon as she could get the bread into the oven it would be time to dish up the dinner for herself and

Amanda. The warm air of the kitchen was savoury with a smell of corned-beef and turnips from the black pot that stood simmering on the back of the stove.

By the door Amanda was stamping vigorously and brushing the snow from her blue woollen skirt, using a somewhat frayed grey goose wing for a whisk-broom. Her bright, flower-like face was flushed with exercise, and wilful wisps of light-yellow hair, escaped from the thick, blue, home-knit hood which she wore tied under her chin, curled down across a pair of dancing blue eyes and a short, straight, well-modelled nose which had a tendency to go up in the air. It went up in the air now, with a gesture of gay audacity, as she tossed her small head to throw back the teasing curls. Though panting from the violence of her exertions she was laughing as if she had enjoyed them. She had been shovelling paths through the great drifts — from the house to the barn, from the barn to the well, and back from the well to the house — a heavy task, but one which, in her young enthusiasm and her joy at being home again from her months of teaching in the distant Settlement, she had made a game

of. The big wooden snow shovel, with lumps of snow still adhering to its wide blade, lay on the floor beside her where she had dropped it as she came in.

"There!" she cried joyously. "That was lots more fun than teaching 'leven times 'leven, mother. Those paths are great. I guess they'll last — till the next storm anyway."

Mrs. Carson smiled without looking up as she deftly portioned the dough into the deep, black baking-pans.

"Well, child, pick up the shovel an' stand it behind the woodbox where it belongs. 'Tain't changed ye none, livin' there in Brine Settlement an' teachin' school. Want a little nigger to run 'round after you an' pick up things same as you used to?"

Amanda looked down at the shovel with a whimsical air of surprise at its thoughtlessness in being on the floor. She gave it a little kick, then picked it up and dutifully deposited it in its exact place behind the woodbox. Turning to her mother with the hopeful expression of one who has earned a reward she cried: "There, Mumzie! And now I want my dinner. I'm starving."

"It's been ready this ha'f hour," answered the mother, slipping a pan of dough into the oven. "You jest dish it up, child, an' I'll be with you in ha'f a minute."

Amanda plucked off her hood, flung it at a chair on the other side of the kitchen, made a pretence of smoothing her hair by pushing it up with the palms of her hands over both temples, then seized a fork and interestedly lifted the cover of the steaming pot.

Just at this moment there came a knock at the door. So strange a knock it was that Amanda dropped the pot cover, startled; and Mrs. Carson, just about to slam the oven door in her brisk way, paused and muttered under her breath: "Lands! What's that?" It was one unmistakable knock, heavy and indefinite, but followed by a vague sound as of scraping and fumbling.

Amanda, instinctively daring, took a couple of steps toward the door. Then she stopped. There was certainly something very "queer" about such a demand for admittance. The fumbling and scraping continued, punctuated with several light taps which somehow sounded unintentional. Then the heavy wooden latch half lifted in its deep socket,

as if something which did not quite understand how to work it was tugging at the latch-string outside. The delicate hair at the nape of the girl's white neck began to creep.

"'Mandy, don't you dare to go for to open that door!" whispered her mother, stepping nimbly around the stove to her side and clutching her arm.

But under her play of childish wilfulness the young girl's courage was high and cool.

"Nonsense, mother!" she replied in a low voice. "It's probably some one nearly dead with cold, too far gone to knock properly. We must open the door. It would be wicked not to." But as she spoke she ran into the bedroom and reappeared instantly with a rifle in her hands. As she went to the door she coolly opened the breech to see that the cartridge was in place, and she snapped it to with a loud click that might serve, if necessary, for a warning to the visitor.

Heedless of her mother's vehement commands, Amanda reached out her left hand to the latch, standing well back from the door and holding the rifle in readiness to leap in a flash to her shoulder. But before her

fingers could touch the latch, in a terrifying way it slowly lifted itself clear of the socket and the heavy door swung open. Amanda's first impulse was to hurl herself upon it and strive to shut it against the mystery. But before she could accomplish this she caught sight of the visitor and stopped in amazement. A huge moose, with antlers spreading far beyond each doorpost, stood before her blocking the whole doorway, and hesitatingly thrust in his great black muzzle.

"Shoot it! Shoot it!" cried Mrs. Carson. "It's tryin' to git in at us! Shoot it, I tell you!"

But Amanda, lowering the gun, broke into half-hysterical laughter. The tension had been brief but severe, and the relief was infinite. She had not realized how desperately frightened she was. But she understood animals, wild and tame, instinctively; and she loved them all. She reached out her hand and patted the great, appealing muzzle.

"Shoot him, mother? Why, of course not! Don't talk of such a thing! See how he's trembling. Something has been chasing him and he's come to us for protection.

What could it be to frighten a great big thing like him?"

Mrs. Carson had recovered herself by this time, but she was angry at having been so badly frightened.

"If you hain't got sense enough to shoot the critter, 'Mandy, then shoo him out an' shut that door, quick. I'll not have him gittin' in here an' tramplin' over things, I tell you. The impidence of him! Shut that door this minute. You're lettin' all the cold in."

Amanda laughed cheerfully.

"He can't get in, possibly, Mumzie! See, his antlers are wider than the door. I think he must be a tame moose who has been petted a lot, so that a house means friends and safety for him. Well, you've come to the right place, old fellow. I wish I knew what it was had scared you so."

The great beast's flanks were heaving violently and he still trembled; but it was plain to Amanda that he now felt himself to be with friends. Stretching out his ridiculously long, overhanging, semi-prehensile upper lip he tried to get hold of a fold of the girl's skirt. The mystery of the lifted latch

was explained. He had been pulling at the string with that inquisitive lip.

Amanda stopped speaking for a moment, delightedly inspecting her protégé. Her mother, still excited, was just about to return to the attack when Amanda forestalled her.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed. "I told you he was a tame moose, mother! He's been driven in harness. Look where it has chafed him on the shoulder. How perfectly lovely! I wonder if the poor dear would eat some cornmeal!"

Snatching a plate from the table she ran to the meal-barrel and scooped up a double handful of the coarse golden meal. Mrs. Carson, half ready to be mollified by the idea that the animal was really a tame one, looked on doubtfully while Amanda thrust the plate of meal under his muzzle. The moose sniffed at it, then, not recognizing the smell, blew an irresolute blast through his nostrils. The meal flew all over the floor and over the front of Amanda's dress. Straightway the moose, appearing to make up his mind that this was something good to eat, sank on his fore-knees and began greedily licking up the yellow particles. The

better to get at them he turned his head sideways and succeeded in jamming a portion of one great antler through the doorway.

But the sight of the spilt meal was too much for the tidy soul of Mrs. Carson, whose jarred nerves, moreover, took offence at the gay laughter with which Amanda greeted the animal's delinquency. Darting forward with a cry of "Git out o' here, you dirty beast!" she snatched up the wooden potato-masher and, before Amanda could stop her, aimed a furious blow at the offender's nose.

Accuracy of aim, however, was not one of Mrs. Carson's strong points. And besides, just at the crucial moment Amanda had caught her arm. The blow fell, not on the animal's nose but on one of the branchy points of the intruding antlers. It was a sturdy blow, as the good lady in her vexation had meant it to be. But the result of it was so out of all proportion to its intent that she recoiled with a horified groan, dropping the potato-masher while Amanda wailed pitifully: "Mother, mother, how could you?"

The moose, startled by Mrs. Carson's assault, had lurched to his feet and withdrawn his head with such violence that the

antler was torn clear off. It fell at Mrs. Carson's very toes, its raw butt, suffused with tiny globules of blood, convicting her amazed eyes of an atrocious piece of cruelty. She wrung her hands and protested, half crying: "Oh, 'Mandy, I didn't mean to! How was I to know it would come off so easy?"

The victim, however, seemed comparatively unperturbed by his astonishing injury. After giving his head a vigorous shake, as if perhaps a bee had stung him, he dismissed the matter and once more thrust in his nose toward Amanda as if begging her for caresses. The loss of his antler he did not appear to notice. Then Amanda remembered that this was about the time when moose should shed their antlers. Her horrified face relaxed. She was on the point of bursting into wild laughter. But she checked her mirth sternly, thinking it advisable that her mother's penitence should endure a little.

"Poor critter!" muttered Mrs. Carson, picking up the shed antler and standing it respectfully against the wall, and regarding it as if she thought of trying to stick it on again. "Seems to me he's mighty good-

natured not to git ugly over a thing like that. Hadn't we better rub some mutton taller on to it, 'Mandy?"

"I don't believe it's worth while, mother," replied the girl. "You see, at this time of year there'll be no flies to bother the sore spot. I don't believe it hurts him so very much after all; because, you know, he'd have to lose his horns before spring anyway. They always drop off sometime in the winter; so it isn't as if it would never grow out again."

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman in a tone of immense relief. "I forgot about 'em sheddin' their horns. But I reckon it must 'ave hurt all the same. Looks mighty red an' sore. An' all I can say is I'd 'a' made more fuss than he did if any one had 'a' done that to me!"

Amanda broke out into a peal of laughter which made the moose draw back in astonishment.

"Well, well, child," said her mother testily, "you know what I mean! Don't be so smart. Git your old critter tied up in the barn if you're goin' to, and don't keep dinner waitin' all day."

Amanda became thoughtful. "But I don't quite know how we're going to get him there," she answered.

"Why," said Mrs. Carson, "if he was a horse you'd lead him. An' if he was a cow you'd drive him. Now which is he? That's for you to decide, being a school-teacher, an' your business to know such things. But do be quick about it afore we freeze stiff." And she turned away resolutely to dish up the dinner.

"Of course," said the girl with authority, "he's much more of a cow than a horse. But I think I'll try leading him, all the same. He doesn't look as if he'd be easy to drive. Please hand me that bit of clothes-line, mother, there's a dear!"

Mrs. Carson complied, and then brought the girl her hood and put it on her head impatiently. Amanda, with the skill of one who has been brought up on a farm, knotted the rope first about the animal's neck and then around his muzzle, forming a halter — a process to which he submitted with a patient air which showed that he was used to it. Then she pushed his great forehead vigorously with both hands, to make him

get out of the doorway. He obeyed at once, backing carefully as if stepping between shafts; and when she turned to lead him down the deep, narrow path to the barn he followed so close that his ponderous muzzle was thrust over her shoulder.

They had almost reached the barn when the moose lifted his head with a jerk and gave an angry snort. Amanda, following his eyes, peered away across the white, undulating surface and caught sight of three shadowy grey shapes just slinking into the woods.

"Wolves!" she remarked to her follower. "So that was what was hunting you, was it? Well, you don't seem to be much afraid of them now!" And she concluded that the slinking beasts had been harassing and trailing their great quarry without daring to come within reach of his hoofs and antlers until he should be too worn out to defend himself. It was evident that they had no taste now for following up the venture.

For a few seconds the moose glared fiercely after his vanished foes, then followed his conductor obediently into the barn. Old Jerry, the sorrel horse whom Amanda had ridden as a child, from his stall whinnied

inquiringly at sight of the tall stranger; and the two red and white cows snorted and backed in their stanchions. But the moose paid them no attention whatever. It was plain that he felt quite at home in a barn with cattle and horses. Amanda tied him beside the haymow where he could help himself; then, chafing her numbed fingers, she raced back to the house, eager to get in out of the stinging cold. Her mother was already seated at the table awaiting her.

"Won't that splendid fellow be a great Christmas present for Dad!" she cried joyously, patting back her rebellious wisps of hair and hastily rinsing her slim fingers before she sat down.

"I'd like to know what good he'll be to him!" said Mrs. Carson sceptically. "With them legs o' his he'll walk right over all the fences an' eat up everything he takes a shine to. I never did see, 'Mandy, what you could find so interestin' in all such outlandish critters. Give me a good horse, or a cow that don't jump, or even a dawg, says I."

"Well, mother, I like them too, you know!" agreed Amanda happily, evading the discussion.

CHAPTER II

It wanted but two days of Christmas, and there was yet much to be done in making ready for Christmas Eve, when, according to his custom, John Carson would arrive home hearty, ruddy and hungry after his long trip in from the lumber camps on Black River. Mrs. Carson and Amanda had a busy afternoon making pies — pumpkin, apple, mince — and frying in the great pot of sputtering lard an endless array of fragrant, goldy-brown doughnuts. The two women were little concerned about the storm, which had drifted full the narrow, backwoods roads. They knew that it would be a storm indeed that could hinder John Carson on his snowshoes from getting home for Christmas. What was forty miles of wilderness trail to him even though the mercury should be hovering around the twenty-below-zero? Unfailing as the almanac he would come shouting over the twilight fields, kick off his snowshoes at the door and impatiently wipe the frost from his bearded lips before catching wife and daughter to his breast. Neither woman was troubled by misgivings on this score.

The event of the season would not fail them.

Occupied as she was, Amanda had no time to devote to the big stranger in the barn. But when, toward sundown, she and her mother went out to milk the cows and fodder the stock for the night she found that he had managed to knock off his remaining antler, probably having felt the uneven weight an annoyance. The change which this wrought in his appearance met with Mrs. Carson's hearty approval, for, as she remarked to Amanda, it made him look "so much more natural-like." She went up and stroked him condescendingly; and as he, in return, nibbled trustfully at her apron with his long, sensitive muzzle, Amanda saw that his position in the family was assured. She knew that her mother, having once accepted him, would love him as she did Old Jerry and the red and white cows.

The following morning was one of blue, unclouded sky and snapping cold. Amanda had intended putting the moose in harness to see if he were really broken to it. But there was still too much to be done in the house. The plum pudding was yet to be

prepared. Instead of the novel and exciting pastime of harnessing a giant bull moose she saw her duty sternly pointing her to the task of stoning raisins. With a sigh she obeyed; and she managed to get some consolation from the raisins themselves, which were sweet and plump, the very best that Brine Settlement could supply.

The dish of raisins was a formidable one, for John Carson had always an appetite and liked his pudding rich. But before Amanda was half-way through her task she was interrupted — and the raisins were forgotten.

There came a peremptory knock, which was repeated before Mrs. Carson could get to the door. The visitor proved to be a good-looking young fellow, who kicked off his snowshoes outside and pulled off his deep fur cap ceremoniously as he entered. Mrs. Carson hastened to bring him a chair; while Amanda, whose hands were conspicuously sticky, pushed back her hair with a rounded, white forearm and flashed him a smile of cordial welcome. The stranger was dressed in the thick homespuns and cowhide "larrigans" of the lumberman, but at his throat, as he threw open his heavy jacket, showed

a collar obviously fresh and obviously linen, with a neatly tied four-in-hand cravat. He had a strong-featured though boyish face, with dark, direct eyes and a close-trimmed brown moustache, and from the accents of his greeting Amanda decided at once that though he might be from the lumber camps he was certainly not of them.

"Won't you set up closer to the fire?" suggested Mrs. Carson heartily. "It's a right cold day out."

"No, thank you, not just yet. My fingers are a bit numb!" replied the visitor, pulling off his woollen mittens and chafing his hands — which, as Amanda noted, were strong and well kept. "You are Mrs. Carson, aren't you?" he continued.

"The same," said Mrs. Carson, while Amanda, not to be quite left out, nodded assent.

"My name's Ross — Alec Ross. And I'm just on my way in from Donovan's Camp on Forks Brook. I happened to stop in at Crimmins's — and it was lucky I did. I found Mrs. Crimmins desperately ill — pneumonia or something of that sort, I should think. And she's all alone. No one else in

the house but her little three-year-old boy and her feeble old grandfather, who, as you know, is almost as much of a care as the child."

"Oh!" exclaimed Amanda commiseratingly, setting the bowl of raisins on the table and going to wash her hands. The young man's eyes followed her with quick appreciation.

"My, but that's bad!" said Mrs. Carson in a worried voice. "The old man's pretty nigh stone blind an' deafer'n a post."

"I fixed things up the best way I could," Ross continued, "and now I'm hurrying in to the Settlement for the doctor. But you know what that will mean. The best I can hope to do won't get him back there before to-morrow morning. It's dreadful to think of what may happen in the meantime. I thought — I hoped — there might be some one here who could go over and stay with them till I get back. But I see it is impossible. No woman alone could get a team through those fifteen miles of drifts that I have just come over."

Mrs. Carson wrung her hands.

"Oh," she cried in keen distress, "to think

o' poor Nancy Crimmins in sich trouble an' us not able to lift a finger to help her! Quick there, 'Mandy, git Mr. Ross a cup o' hot tea. No, Mr. Ross, you set right where you are," she continued with decision, seeing that the young man had risen to go. "You spare two minutes to wait for your tea an' you'll go the faster an' the farther for it."

As it was yet a good twenty-five miles in to Brine Settlement, Ross recognized the wisdom of her advice and sank back into his chair, rubbing the stiff muscles of his calves. But he observed that Amanda was not getting the tea. Instead of that she was taking down a heavy, coonskin coat from the yellow clothes-press by the bedroom door.

"What on airth are you doin', child?" demanded her mother sharply, but with a note of anxiety in her voice.

"I'm going over to take care of Mrs. Crimmins till the doctor comes," said the girl quietly.

"But you ain't! You ain't goin' to stir out of this house, 'Mandy Carson," decreed her mother.

Now Amanda was nearly twenty-two years old, and it was a matter of general knowledge

that her control of the rather turbulent school at Brine Settlement was perfect. Her usually wilful mouth was not wilful at all now, but grave and firm.

"You know very well that I must go, mother," she answered gently. "Do you suppose I could stay here, with poor Mrs. Crimmins maybe dying? Stay here safe and comfortable — stoning raisins?" she went on, with a little break in her voice. "Please, mother, get Mr. Ross his tea as quick as you can and then come and help me get ready."

There was a finality in this quiet speech that brought Mrs. Carson at once to terms. She bustled off to get the tea, but at the same time she became almost tearful in her excitement.

"Oh, why won't you never listen to reason, 'Mandy?" she wailed. "You was always that headstrong! But you'll never git there. You'll git stuck fast in the snow. An' you'll be frozen stiff, you know you will. An' oh! what will your poor father say when he gits home an' finds you gone? Mr. Ross," she cried, turning suddenly to the young man who had been watching Amanda with the keenest admiration, "you speak to her! You

tell her she can't do it, an' hadn't ought to try. Maybe she'll listen to a man!"

Alec Ross got up from his seat. "Allow me to say, Miss Carson, I'm afraid your mother's right. I know just how you feel about it; and if you'll allow me to say so I think your pluck is splendid. But you could never get a horse through those drifts all by yourself. It's hard, but I guess you'll have to give it up."

Amanda tossed her head defiantly. "That's nonsense!" she declared. "Don't you suppose I can go on snowshoes just as well as you if I want to? What's fifteen miles?"

Ross hesitated. He did not want to alarm the two women, living there alone in the vast solitudes. But it was plainly necessary to be frank.

"I've no doubt you could do it if you say so," he replied. "But, strange as it may seem, there are wolves around this winter. For the last fifty years or so, as you know, they've been unheard of in this part of the country; but now they've come back."

He spoke with an air of having settled the question. And Mrs. Carson beamed approval as she set the cup of hot, strong tea before him.

But Amanda answered very quietly: "Yes, I knew the wolves had come back!" Both Ross and Mrs. Carson stared at her in amazement. "*You* don't seem to concern yourself much about them!" she continued.

Ross threw back his jacket with a boyish gesture and displayed a pair of "thirty-eights" in his belt. "I'm ready for them if they should come along looking for trouble," said he.

"Well," said Amanda, "I'm really and truly not one bit worried about them either. They're nothing but skulking curs, these Eastern wolves. And I've got my Winchester, a repeater, which I know how to use. I'm not thinking about wolves — I saw three of them yesterday slinking along the edge of the clearing, and they 'put' when they saw me. It was they that had been chasing my moose, mother. Well, now I'm going to hitch up my moose in the pung and see if his long legs won't pull me through the drifts — for I know very well Old Jerry couldn't do it. If the moose fails me, I'll turn him loose and go on with my snowshoes. But I do believe, mother, it was just for this that the moose was sent to us."

To Mrs. Carson's deeply religious and somewhat superstitious mind this last suggestion carried such weight that forthwith, in spite of the dreadful menace of the wolves, her opposition vanished. It was "a sign," as she would have called it. But Alec Ross looked so amazed that it was necessary to tell him the whole story while he drank his tea. He was full of misgivings; but he saw that it was useless to try to dissuade the resolute girl. So assuming a confidence which he was very far from feeling he cheerfully pledged himself to meet her next morning at Crimmins's. Then, pulling his cap far down over his ears, he slipped his feet into the thongs of his snowshoes and went off with the long, swinging stride of the practised snowshoer.

"He ain't no lumberman," said Mrs. Carson, eyeing him critically as he went, "but I reckon he knows what he's about." And Amanda, who was pulling on an extra pair of thick woollen stockings, agreed with her.

CHAPTER III

AMANDA was quite right about the moose. He had been thoroughly broken to harness. It was evident that he had been taken as a very young calf and brought up as a pet on some far backwoods farm. He was docility itself, and plainly loved to be handled. But as he had not been trained to take the bit, Amanda had to drive him with reins attached to a halter. She found the reins of little use, however, for the great beast responded to the commands "Haw," "Gee," "Whoa," "G'long," "Git-up," like a well-trained and willing ox, but far more sensitively than any ox had ever the wit to do.

Sitting low in the sturdy pung with a hot brick at her feet, warmly clad, well bundled in old-fashioned buffalo robes, her hands double-mittened and her face shining rosy from its encircling folds of a white woolen scarf, Amanda found herself enjoying her journey in spite of her anxieties and her sad errand. She was exhilarated beyond words by her easy control of this novel and imposing steed. With his enormous, spreading hoofs, which formed a species of snowshoe, partly

bearing him up, with his vast strength of shoulder and singular length of leg, the moose took her through depths of drift where a horse would have hopelessly foundered. He forged ahead not fast but steadily, and the pung, on its low runners and wide shoes, rode fairly high in the snow.

Of the wolves she saw never a sign; and so, without event, by the middle of the afternoon she came to Crimmins's wide clearing.

She found the sick woman half delirious with pain, fever and anxiety, the child whimpering with terror, the bent old man muttering to himself as he gropingly fed the fire with the abundant wood which Alec Ross had stored behind the stove. The situation was unspeakably pitiful, and Amanda thanked Heaven that she had been resolute to come. Her coming, indeed, seemed to work an instant miracle, as the child's fears were soothed, the sick woman's terrible anxiety relaxed, and the old man felt once more free to doze in his big chair. There was so much to be done that for hours Amanda had no time to think. Not until late that night, with the child asleep in his trundle-bed, and the old man vanished to his tiny cupboard room,

was she able to sit down and rest. Only then did she begin to realize how exhausted she was.

She found an old magazine on a shelf in the corner and turned over the pages. But she could not read, with the sick woman's painful breathing loud in her ears. She found, though she did not realize it, that the only thing that could divert her attention from the sound was to think about the man who had so unexpectedly launched her on this errand. She pictured to herself his kind and strong young face, his courtesy, his unselfishness, his helpfulness, the grace and force of his figure as he swung off across the snow from her mother's door. A pang seized her as she thought of him, perhaps trailed by wolves, perhaps in a running fight with them, before he could reach the Settlement. But this thought she threw off with scorn. The slinking brutes would never dare actually to attack him. Then she smiled to herself, a smile of indulgent tenderness, as she recalled the evidences which she had found of his kindly but bungling efforts in the sick-room. Yet he had not done so badly after all, for a man, she thought.

The clock began to strike for midnight. In a few seconds it would be Christmas Eve. She wondered if she would be home before her father arrived. She hoped so, passionately. She did not like to think of his big, disappointed face if she were not there to greet him — of his desperate anxiety over her rash expedition. At last she felt her eyelids irresistibly drooping and she sprang to her feet. She must not fall asleep. She went over to the bed and found the patient less restless, her breathing apparently eased by the hot poultices of flaxseed in which Amanda had lavishly enveloped her chest. Amanda did not know much about sickness, but she knew enough to feel gratified when she found that the patient's racing pulse had grown less threadlike and uneven.

And now for hours the fight to keep awake. It occupied all her attention. She had never known that hours could be so interminable. She dared not sit down for more than a moment at a time. And often she thought the clock must have stopped, so slowly crawled the hands. But the night did pass, and just on the bitter edge of dawn came the sound of bells. The doctor and Ross had

arrived, bringing with them a nurse from the Settlement.

Amanda heard the doctor pronounce that her nursing and her flaxseed poultices had probably saved the day — that Mrs. Crimmins would probably pull through. She caught the look of immeasurable admiration in Alec Ross's eyes. Then, curling herself up happily like a child in the old man's big chair, she went fast asleep.

After the long strain which she had been under it was midday and past before Amanda was fit to set out for home. Alec Ross, whose muscles seemed to be of steel, was about returning to the Settlement, and Amanda, with a trepidation which made her angry at herself, offered him a seat in the pung. He accepted eagerly — but with a quizzical proviso that she should not ask him to drive.

"I've no great idea of myself as a Hagenbeck!" he apologized.

"Don't think for a moment I'd let you drive this dear beast!" retorted Amanda with decision. "He seems to know just what I want him to do. I don't believe he'd be quite pleased to have any one drive him but me."

"He is a beast of sense. I entirely agree with him," said the young man as he tucked the wraps carefully about her before taking his seat.

Amanda's small nose went up in the air with a mixture of doubt and defiance. She was not quite sure whether he was quizzing her or not. Perhaps, even, he was making fun of her moose — which would have been unforgivably stupid of him. She was annoyed and disappointed. But as her attention was occupied with the start he never noticed her ill humour. He began to talk, gaily and interestingly. And he was so obviously, boyishly happy over the situation that Amanda felt speedily convicted of injustice and set herself to make up to him for the wrong of which he was so unaware. In such a mood, with her beauty, her sparkle, her childlike confidence and frank audacities, she was dangerously intoxicating; and Alec Ross felt her going rapidly to his head. The better to keep a grip on himself he became grave and quiet. But as Amanda saw from a side glance at his face that he was in no way discontented, his quietness by no means damped her spirits. She told herself, with

conviction, that she was "having a lovely time."

The moose, meanwhile, went faithfully. But it was slow travelling through the depths of broken drift. The early winter dark closed down before they had covered much more than half the journey. This was of no consequence, however, for the sky was full of stars so sharply clear that they almost seemed to snap, and the snow spread everywhere a wide, spectral glimmer. With the falling of the dark Amanda fell silent and seemed to give all her attention to the driving. But she was content. As was fitting, nay, essential in such cold, she was allowing herself to sit quite close to her companion, whose silence, somehow, did not seem uncompanionable.

About an hour after dark they came, still silent, to the lonely fork of the roads where, through a stretch of burnt lands, a confusion of tumbled and shrouded trunks, the trail from the Black River Camp joined the main road.

"This is the road father comes by," said Amanda. "I do hope we're ahead of him, so he won't be worried. He doesn't generally come so early as this."

"No," said Alec Ross, "he hasn't gone by yet. No sign of snowshoe tracks along here except mine of yesterday. You'll be in lots of time the way this excellent menagerie of yours travels. But, no! By George, I'm wrong! There is another track — over by mine, on your right."

"Oh, let's hurry!" cried the girl. "We must hurry and try and overtake him. Get up, there, Moose. There's a dear!"

"But it may not be your father's track after all," objected Ross.

"Of course it is! Who else could it be from that direction?" retorted Amanda impatiently.

"You know," Ross reminded her, "the trail from Johnson's runs into the Black River road about a mile back."

"But I just know it's his," began Amanda, "because ——"

She stopped short as a shrill sound, half bark, half howl, came from up the Black River trail. It was answered instantly by another in a slightly lower key.

The moose gave a leap forward, then stopped abruptly with a snort.

"It's your friends, the wolves, and not far

off," said Alec Ross. He spoke lightly. But at the same time he slipped his right hand in under his coat till it found the grip of his Colts.

Amanda's face was drawn with distress and indecision. She was in a fever to hurry forward, to overtake her father before he should reach home. But there was something in those sounds which stirred terrible imaginings within her. She could not bear to go on. The thin, hair-raising cries were repeated.

"It sounds to me as if they were at something," she suggested. "What if they had some one up a tree?"

The picture made by her own suggestion burned itself into her mind with awful clearness.

"Perhaps they *have* something up a tree," agreed Ross. "A grumbling old porcupine, most likely. Much good may it do them!"

"I don't know anything about wolves except what I've read; but I don't believe they're such fools as that," said the girl. And coming to a sudden decision she started to turn the moose. "Won't you please get out and lift the pung around so we won't upset?"

"By George, but you've got the pluck!"

exclaimed the young man, obeying with alacrity. "But will your beast stand for it?"

The beast evidently had no objection, but rather, having unlimited faith in his human protectors, seemed ambitious to get to close quarters with the foe.

As the pung started up the Black River road Amanda said deprecatingly: "I expect I'm an awful fool! But you know it might be — some man! And I just couldn't go home and be happy if I didn't make sure, could I? Could you?"

"I think you are" — he hesitated, while ardent words crowded to his lips, and finally said, "all right."

It was tame enough, but the tone in which he said it made it seem to Amanda a lyric eulogy. In a sort of exaltation she urged the moose forward. For all the thought she had of danger to herself she might have been going to a poultry show.

Just at that moment the wolves gave cry again, several voices commingling and with an unmistakable note of excitement.

"They have got something there, sure enough!" exclaimed Ross. "And they're close ahead — just around that bend."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when across the clamour of the wolves came a shout — a man's voice, dauntless and authoritative.

Amanda's heart stood still. "My God!" she gasped. "It's father!"

CHAPTER IV

THE fact that for the last half dozen miles his steps had been dogged by five wolves did not greatly trouble John Carson. It made him angry, however, and he wished they would get up courage enough to come within reach of his axe. At last he fell to thinking how awkward it might be if anything should happen. And then, just as he was thinking of it, happen it did. The shivered top of a stump, hidden by a film of snow, caught his snowshoe in such a way as to trip him in the full swing of his stride and hurl him headlong to the bottom of a little gulch. As he fell he heard the snap of a breaking snowshoe frame.

The flesh of his nape crawled, expecting the crunch of teeth. He was up again instantly out of the smother, facing the enemy

and dashing the snow from his eyes. But as instantly he sank back, his right leg giving way beneath him.

The wolves had darted forward, but had not quite screwed up their courage to attack him. Three of them stood, with bared fangs, glaring down upon him, green-eyed. A lightning sweep of the axe-blade convinced them that the man was still too dangerous to meddle with, and they shrank back. They knew they could afford to wait. But they did not like waiting. Two or three of them sat back rather disconsolately on their haunches and gave utterance to impatient cries — perhaps trying to summon others of their tribe who would enable them to overwhelm their quarry at once.

A hideous fear went through John Carson's mind that he had broken his leg — that at last, spent with pain and deadened with the creeping frost, he would no longer be able to fight off the cowardly pack. With his heart thumping in his throat he felt searchingly at the place of his hurt. Soon he satisfied himself that there were no bones broken. But it was plain that he had wrenched loose one of the great tendons of the leg. How long,

he wondered, would it take him to struggle home, dragging the helpless limb yard by yard, hour by hour through the drifts and fighting off the wolves, who would grow bolder when they came to realize his plight? He set his jaw doggedly for the battle, freed his feet from the now useless snowshoes and raised himself erect on one leg, using the unbroken snowshoe as a crutch. Could he win through? Well, he would make a great fight for it.

As he stood there, his sinews stretching with heroic wrath, a sudden jangle of sleigh-bells came to his ears. He shouted fiercely. A woman's voice as well as a man's answered him. To his astonishment the woman's voice was Amanda's. But his surprise turned to utter bewilderment when, a minute later, around the turn of the road came into view a gigantic moose, ploughing triumphantly through the snow and drawing a loaded pung behind him. The wolves drew back uneasily at this strange apparition. From the pung a shot rang out, and then another, and one of the wolves dropped, kicking voicelessly. The others wheeled and fled for cover, stretching out belly to snow in the frantic haste of their

flight. The next minute the strange equipage came to a stand close before him, the moose snorting and shaking his head as if taking all the credit of the victory.

"Father! father!" cried Amanda in a voice that shook on the edge of hysterical tears, as she leaped from the pung and struggled to his side, "what — what's the matter?"

John Carson's big-chested laugh reassured her.

"It's jest a little h'ist, an' a game leg thereby," said he. "But ye've happened along mighty handy, Sis, you an' your circus. Them brutes had their own notions about doctorin' me, an' as we couldn't agree there was goin' to be trouble."

"Oh, dad!" murmured Amanda. And then, overwhelmed by the thought of what would have happened if she had gone straight on, instead of turning up the Black River road, she sat down in the snow and began to cry.

"There! there! Don't be scared, Honey!" pleaded her father anxiously. "It's all over. They're all gone. An' everything's all right."

"I don't think Miss Carson's scared," said

Alec Ross dryly. "She's the bravest woman in the world. But she's a bit overstrained. Come, Miss Carson, if you'll turn your beast around we'll help your father into the pung and get him home as quickly as possible."

The drive home did not seem long to either Alec Ross or Amanda; nor, for all his suffering, did big John Carson let it appear that it seemed long to him. If his face went white from time to time at the torturing lunges of the pung among the drifts it could not be seen, and his strong voice maintained its cheer. He had much to ask about, much to be told, in order to understand the happy miracle of Amanda's appearance so in the nick of time. When the sound of their bells and voices summoned Mrs. Carson to the door, and in the streaming light she saw her husband being almost lifted from the pung between Amanda and young Ross, she darted out into the snow with a scream. But her terror was forgotten in thankfulness and joy when she heard the story of his rescue.

After supper, when Alec Ross rose to get ready for the long tramp into Brine Settlement, there was vehement protest from both John Carson and his wife.

"You don't quit my house this night, lad," thundered Carson.

"The idee!" snapped Mrs. Carson with cordial heat. "After all you've been through these last two days! If you must git into the Settlement, why it'll be time enough to start to-morrow mornin', surely!"

"You would be perfectly crazy to start to-night," said Amanda.

"An' why not stop over with us for Christmas, anyways?" urged John Carson, who could not imagine any place more attractive than this backwoods home of his from which he had to be so much away. "We'll take good care of ye here, an' give ye lots of plum puddin' an' doughnuts — won't we, mother? Take my advice, young man, an' stay right where ye are!"

"But, dad," protested Amanda, "you forget that Mr. Ross may have friends of his own in at the Settlement, so he may not be able to spare us so much of his time."

"If you hain't got any special, particular reason for hurryin' off to-morrow you'd better stay over!" said Mrs. Carson. "We sure want you."

Alec Ross hesitated, boyishly in doubt as

to whether he might allow himself to accept the tempting invitation. His eyes sought Amanda's, but she would not meet them.

"It was just 'for Christmas' I was going in," he answered. Then, rather hurriedly: "I have no reasons half as great for wanting to go to the Settlement as I have for wanting to stay here."

"Then please stay!" said Amanda, getting up quickly from her place by the lamp to hide the flush which she felt mounting to her cheeks.

Puck o' the Dusk

Bat, bat, come under my hat,
And I will give you a slice of bacon.

SO sings Mother Goose, with that airy irrelevancy, that unblushing disregard of probability, which make her so fascinating a companion to the wise, but so dangerous, so misleading a guide to the ardent young mind in search of facts. There is nothing in the context to show why the lady, unlike all other ladies who have ever lived, should invite the bat to come under her hat, or even be able to contemplate without shrieks the possibility of a bat coming under her hat. It may be but another instance of that wilfulness, that indifference to convention, which she displays in almost all her poems. Or it may be that she wanted to show how much braver she was than all other women. In either case, we may be sure that she never intended the bat to accept her invitation. The inducement which

she offered was one which no bat in the world would give a "tinker's damn" for. And being, for all her eccentricities, a lady of wide and varied knowledge, she doubtless knew that about the last place in the world where any bat would go was under a hat — any hat, no matter how enchanting the face beneath it. Perhaps, after all, she was merely poking a little sly fun at her sisters of the Universal Feminine for their frantic delusion that a bat would like to get into their hair. Mother Goose knew very well that nothing but superior force, unscrupulously employed, would make a bat entangle himself in any woman's hair, however bewildering.

It was not of hats, or of hair, indeed, that Puck o' the Dusk was thinking, as he zigzagged through the purple twilight under the thick-leaved, overhanging boughs. Gnats, for the moment, were all his thought. The long, still hours of the golden summer day he had slept away very pleasantly, hanging from the edge of a warped board far up in the shadowy peak of the old barn in the meadow. Other brown bats had hung there beside him, suspended, like him, by their long, hooked nails, and demurely sheathed, like him, in the

silken dusky membrane of their folded wings. It was a popular dormitory for the bats, up there in the dim peak, for the edge of that warped board gave a convenient place whereon to attach themselves; and, consequently, there had been some crowding. From time to time one or another, finding himself squeezed, would wake up and squeak and prod his neighbour with the bony elbow of his wing, and chatter protestingly in a tiny voice — very tiny, but thinly harsh and vibrant, like the winding of a dollar watch. Puck himself, who chanced to hang on the very end of the row, next to the wide crack in the gable which gave exit to the outer air, had more than once been almost crowded from his perch, so that he had had to do rather more than his share of waking up, elbowing, and watch-winding. Once or twice, too, in this unwonted wakefulness, he had been annoyed by the sight of a large rat, prowling along a big beam far beneath him and glaring up at him with cruel, beady eyes. He loathed rats, but, knowing himself securely out of this one's reach, he had not been alarmed. He had folded himself up in his wings and gone to sleep again, even while the enemy was looking at him. So, on the

whole, the day had gone by pleasantly enough. As the afternoon drew on, he had roused himself several times to scramble flutteringly over to the crack in the gable and take a glance out at the weather, till at last, when the sun had fairly sunk behind the low hills on the other side of the stream, he had sidled through the crack and launched himself upon the gold-and-violet dusk. Within ten minutes he had been followed by all the other occupants of the dormitory, and the peak of the old barn was left empty.

He was a strange-looking creature, the little brown bat — a mixture of bird and mouse and goblin, droll, yet sinister — an impish Puck who drowsed away the hours of sun, and awoke at dusk to whimsical and eccentric activities. His insignificant body, covered with a short brown fur of exquisite fineness, was hung between two immense wings of sooty-dark membrane. This membrane, more elastic than the finest rubber, was stretched, like silk over an umbrella frame, upon the enormously developed arm and finger-bones of the fore-limbs. The two wings were joined together at the tail, and connected with the frail hind-legs as far down as the knees, which

seemed to bend in the wrong direction. Between the powerful shoulder-blades was set a curious little shapeless head, with a pug of a nose, whimsically wide and crooked mouth, big flat ears, and tiny, beadlike, impishly-glittering black eyes.

Awkward and grotesque as he was when swinging from his perch or scrambling up the boarding, the moment he launched himself upon the twilight air, Puck o' the Dusk presented a masterly, though still fantastic, figure. With a combined spread and flexibility of wing such as, weight for weight, no bird could match, his evolutions in the air were of a miraculous alertness. Flying at top speed in a straight line, he could drop instantly like a stone, or dart upwards at apparently right angles to his course, as if shot from a catapult. A dizzying and bewildering zigzag seemed to be his natural flight, and he could dodge in a fashion that would put even the sparrowhawk to shame. And this, indeed, was well. For the darting, dancing gnats and other swift insects were Puck's prey, and the pouncing owls his peculiar enemy.

To-night, as he swung along the scented trees by the water, the windless air was full

of insects — gnats, early night-moths, and the first blundering cockchafers. Being hungry, he hawked ravenously at everything he saw. But as the dusk gathered, and the edge passed off his appetite, he grew more fastidious. He would let many dainties, easily to be had, slip from his very lips, and amuse himself by flickering off in quest of the more nearly unattainable. Once, catching sight of a highflying moth far above the tree-tops, silhouetted, to his keen vision, against the pale violet sky, he shot upward swift as thought, snatched the prize from the very beak of a swooping night-jar, and was gone before the disappointed bird could realize who had forestalled her. Again, dropping headlong, he snapped a cockchafer off a bending grass-head, just as it was spreading its wings to fly, to the furious indignation of a shrew which had been stalking the insect, and was on the very point of springing up at it. It is probable that Puck's eyes, to which the twilight was clear as crystal, had marked the prowling shrew in the grass, and that he took a whimsical delight in snatching the prize. Even the darting swifts were sometimes befooled in this way, as an elusive shadow would flicker past them

and the all-but-captured moth mysteriously vanish.

Soon, as the violet light paled from the sky, Puck o' the Dusk deserted his meadow and flew downstream, over field and hedge, to a spacious garden, with lawns and flower-beds, and a wide-verandahed house set in deep trees. Here the bland summer night was drawing forth an intoxication of perfume from the dew-wet roses and stocks, the Japan lilies, and the spicy-breathed carnations; and hither, enticed by the honey scents, the insects of the night came in swarms. Up and down the wide path at the foot of the garden, under the trees by the water-side, a man and a girl were walking, the girl's white dress glimmering softly in the shadows.

In this pleasant spot Puck was joined by another little brown bat, a female, perhaps his mate, assuredly his playmate. He has not yet revealed enough of his intimacies and domestic habits to enable one to speak confidently on this point. For a little while the two seemed to weave leisurely dances in the air, circling around and over and beneath each other, and from time to time swinging apart on long, dizzying tangents, to meet again un-

erringly at some aerial point of rendezvous. The female flew less lightly, less erratically, than Puck himself; and if one could have observed her at close quarters in a good light, one would have seen that, however playful, she was a most faithful and devoted little mother, carrying her two babies with her through all her frivolling. The little ones managed, in some strange way, to cling about her neck, so securely that not her swiftest whirlings, her most breathless swooping swings, ran any risk of dislodging them. But it must have been a lively experience for the infants, who were yet too young to be left at home in the barn, where a prowling mouse might find them.

In the midst of their play, from somewhere out of space, a wide-winged, noiseless shape swept down upon them. Two enormous eyes, perfectly round, fixed, and palely luminous, glared at them, and huge claws, clutching hideously, snatched at them, this way and that, in dreadful silence. Both Puck and the little mother succeeded in escaping the grasping claws, so lightning swift was their evasion, as if, indeed, they had been blown aside like leaves by the owl's attack. Instantly they vanished deep among the branches, and the dis-

appointed owl winnowed onward to seek some quarry less elusive. In a moment or two the bats fluttered forth again. But, though undaunted, they felt the need of caution while the enemy was still in the neighbourhood. So they betook themselves for their play to the lower end of the garden, where the man and the girl were walking, and began circling and dancing about their preoccupied heads. They considered human beings harmless, and quite useful to keep away owls.

Suddenly, to Puck's amazement, the girl gave a tiny shriek, and hurriedly twisted her light silken scarf about her fair head till she looked like a Pitti Madonna.

"Oh," she cried nervously, "there's another of those dreadful bats trying to get into my hair!"

The man laughed softly and drew her to him.

"Silly one," said he, "the bat couldn't be persuaded to get into even *your* hair! He would have the poor taste to consider it most annoying."

"Oh, but he might blunder into it by mistake," persisted the girl, her wide eyes following apprehensively, from the shelter of his arm, the evolutions of the two dancing shadows.

"You know they are almost blind. And when I was a little girl, Nurse told me that if ever a bat got into my hair, I'd have to have it all cut off, because he would be so snarled up in it there would be no such thing as getting him out."

"Nurse knew a tremendous lot of things that weren't so, I should imagine," rejoined the man. "You will save yourself much anxiety, sweet, on summer evenings, if you bear in mind that bats are as far as possible from being blind. They are marvellously keen-sighted, and they never blunder, but fly and dodge with an accuracy far beyond that of any bird. Either of those little chaps fluttering around us now could pick a gnat off the tip of your small, delectable nose without so much as grazing you with his wing."

"Oh!" said the girl in a tone of relief. "But I don't like them, anyhow. I wish they would go away."

"Like all the world, they hasten to gratify your slightest wish!" responded the man, laughing again. For, even at the girl's last words, both Puck and his playmate had swung away and vanished among the tree-tops.

It was not that they understood English, or

had received upon their sensitive nerve centres a telepathic message from the girl's aversion. Not at all. The fact was simply that the little mother had grown tired, from the weight of her babies hanging to her neck, and had flown off to find a safe branch whereon to hide them for a few moments.

High up in the dark top of a pine tree, the cup-like hollow of a forked bough received the two young ones, who, at some injunction from their mother, flattened their tiny forms to the bark and clung fast to its roughness. There could be no danger for them here, thought the little mother. So she left them, to rest her wings for a few minutes in unburdened flight, and to sup again on a few more gnats and moths. Puck had watched her deposit her babies on the branch, and now flew off with her light-heartedly to forage above the flower-beds.

They had not been away for more than five minutes, when the little mother suddenly got it into her head that her babies wanted her. On a swinging upward curve she sped in haste back to the pine-top, and Puck, after a second's hesitation, followed at her tiny heels.

Now, it chanced that a weasel, his cruel eyes

red with rage and lust of blood, was hunting in the pine tree. He had just lost the trail of a squirrel, which he had been pursuing so closely that he had counted it already his. He had fairly imagined his teeth in the poor chatterer's throat, when, by some miracle of the night — and night among the wild kindreds is full of miracles — quarry and trail had disappeared. It was in the pine tree it had happened, and the furious hunter was questing all over the tree for the lost scent, determined that his malignancy should not be balked. In his search he ran, sinuous and swift as a snake, out along that high branch in one of whose outer forks the little bat had left her babies.

Now, Puck o' the Dusk, in all his short life, had never had a real difference of opinion with anything more formidable than a hawk-moth or a cockchafer. He knew vaguely what an irresistible and terrible monster was that long, dark shape on the branch, yet he did not hesitate. The weasel was astounded to feel a hard wing-tip drawn sharply across his face. With a thin snarl he sprang upward half the length of his body, snapping at his audacious insulter. But his long, white teeth closed on

empty air, and he nearly lost his balance on the branch. As he recovered himself, bursting with fury, he saw behind him, almost within reach, a dark little fluttering shadow apparently sprawling on the branch, like a wounded night-jar. Doubling on himself as lithely as an eel, he darted like a jet of flame upon the insolent little shadow. But even as he did so, it was gone; and a few feet below the branch he saw Puck o' the Dusk flitting leisurely to and fro. His narrow-set eyes blazed like live coals, and he gnashed his long white fangs at the indignity of having been so flouted by a paltry bat. But while he glared down at his small challenger, the little mother had safely gathered her droll babies to her neck and sailed off with them through the gloom. For the moment, after such an experience, she had had enough of frivolling. She thought only of getting her babies back into their safe cranny in the roof of the barn, where she could nurse them, and lick their silky fur, and clean the dainty membranes of their delicate little wings by passing them carefully between her lips.

Left once more to himself, Puck o' the Dusk, perhaps excited and over-daring from his suc-

cessful adventure with the weasel, promptly fell foul of another novel experience. Close in front of the house he chased a big moth, which was flying with unwonted swiftness. Hard pressed, it flew straight into the darkness of a wide-open window. Puck followed audaciously. He caught the fugitive as it bumped up against the ceiling. In the same instant a maid shut the window. Then, without noticing the intruder, she went out and shut the door.

Puck, thinking to go out as easily as he had come in, flew hard against the pale glimmer of the glass. He was a little dazed, and very much astonished. Again, and yet once again, he tried to penetrate the hard, invisible barrier, but not blindly, or in panic violence, as a bird would have done. He kept his head even in this startling and unprecedented emergency. His keen vision, after the first shock of surprise, differentiated the glass from the airy space beyond, and he coolly gave up essaying the impossible. Then he devoted himself to a minute examination of every hole and corner in the room; yet so accurate was he in sight and flight alike, that though the room was full of dainty bibelots and fragile knick-knacks,

the beating of his wings disturbed nothing. He went under every piece of furniture, behind every picture, and investigated persistently the screen which closed the fireplace for the summer. In the course of this minute exploration he routed out an unexpected variety of insects, and he was by no means too perturbed to devour all such dainties that fell to his lot.

The night passed in this way, with some anxiety, indeed, but without monotony. When dawn came grey through the window, and the colour began to return to the glowing geranium-beds, then Puck relinquished his vain quest, but not in despair, by any means. Day for him was the time to go to bed. Hanging himself up comfortably in a fold of the heavy *portières* at one end of the room, he went to sleep with as philosophical a composure as if he had been on his board under the peak of the old barn.

A few hours later two housemaids came into the room and fell to cleaning it. In the course of this operation they took down the *portières*. They shook them in a haphazard way, preparatory to folding them up. To their consternation, out fell Puck o' the Dusk.

Their screams at the sight of this monster, nearly four inches long, brought in the man who had been walking in the garden with the girl the night before. He was in riding-breeches and gloves. Puck, only half awake, and very angry at having been so rudely disturbed, sat up on the rug with wings half outspread and tiny black eyes sparkling. The expression of his opinions to the housemaids was as vehement as he could make it, and sounded something like the winding of a *very* large and very insufficiently oiled dollar watch.

"Good Heavens, Jane," exclaimed the man, "I thought that you and Grace must have unearthed *at least* a hippopotamus, from the row you're making! Do you think that this poor little bat is going to eat you?"

He stooped to pick Puck up, but the little fellow sputtered at him shrilly, and snapped at him with such defiance that the man was glad of his thick gloves. The maids tittered.

"See there, sir!" said Jane audaciously. "He'd eat us if he could, he's that savage!"

"He certainly is a plucky little devil," said the man, as he lifted him gently in his gloved hands and carried him to the window.

Puck was very wide awake now, and his

watch-winding was shrill with indignation over his imprisonment in the man's hands. At the window the man released him. The glare of full daylight dazzled him, but, shutting his eyes to a hair-like slit, almost invisible, he could make out the landscape quite clearly. In an instant he had launched himself, and in the next he was fluttering among the nearest branches. Keeping as far as possible among the trees, he made for the water's edge, and so along the meadows to the old barn. A minute or two later he was hanging himself up, unruffled, beside his sleeping comrades in the warm brown gloom of the peak.

In the ordinary course of events, Puck would now have settled himself to sleep away the rest of the daylight. But this twenty-four hours was destined to be a crowded time for him. On the narrow, topmost rafter, just a few feet below him, he observed his playmate of the previous evening, the little mother with her two babies. She had deposited them on the smooth surface of the beam, while she herself was occupied with her toilet — a matter which is of as much concern to a bat as it is to the daintiest of cats. With amazing expertness she would scratch herself behind the ears

with the clawed tips of her wing-elbows, and comb the fur on apparently inaccessible portions of her body. Then she would take her wing membranes, first one, then the other, and stretch them, examine them, pass them between her teeth, and lick them, till there could be no question as to their immaculateness.

While she was thus occupied, one of the swallows from the mud nests under the eaves darted hastily up into the peak in pursuit of a big purple bee. The desperate insect, just evading its pursuer in the peak, boomed downwards close over the rafter, almost grazing the baby bats as he passed. The swallow, dashing after him recklessly, more than grazed the little sprawlers. He brushed them so rudely that they were swept clean off the rafter. Untaught as yet to fly, they nevertheless spread instinctively their fragile wings, and fell flutteringly, like two dead oak leaves, to the floor below.

The barn floor, fortunately, was littered thick with the seeds and tips and refuse of last year's hay, so the babies landed softly and were not hurt. But they landed far apart, as two whirling leaves might have done. The

mother, who at the moment of the accident was fairly enveloped in the folds of her wings, disengaged herself frantically and swooped downwards after them. Then Puck, grown enterprising from his late adventures, came zigzagging down in her wake to see if there was anything he could do.

There was, and that instantly. The big rat who lived under the barn floor was just coming out of his hole. He thought he had seen something fall, and though he did not know what it was, he came scuttling forward with high hopes. It might, he thought, be a young swallow dropped or crowded out of its nest, and he liked young swallows, for variety.

Suddenly his attention was distracted by a light blow on his head. It was a bat, which had apparently almost dropped upon his back. He was not angry — quite the contrary — he was immensely interested. He had never eaten a bat, though he had often wanted to; and here, seemingly, was his chance, for this bat appeared to be hurt or sick. He jumped up at it. He missed it, to be sure, but not by so very much; and the bat was still fluttering feebly almost within his reach. Again and again he sprang, his long, white teeth snapping

together with a horrid click, but catching nothing, till presently he found himself once more over by the hole in the corner whence he had just emerged. Then, to his disgust, the feebly fluttering shape which had seemed just within his clutch went darting off on strong wings to the roof, while another bat rose whirling from the middle of the floor, with two little ones clinging to her neck.

Baffled and sullen, the rat crept out into the grass to console himself with easy grasshoppers; while Puck o' the Dusk, swelling with triumph, swung back to his high perch. What with owls and weasels, moths and men and rats, he felt far from his customary drowsiness; so he set himself to a toilet elaborate and minute, as befitted a brown bat of his achievements.

A Harassed Householder

ALTHOUGH he had never had the advantage of reading a bargain sale advertisement, the big fur seal needed no exhortation to come early and avoid the rush. This was his second season as a full-grown bull, the responsible freeholder of a patch of naked rock-ledge on the skirts of an island in Bering Sea.

The preceding season he had been late in coming north; and so, for all his wrath and his battle prowess, he had fared poorly, as to both location and wives. He had been forced to content himself with a mean and exposed shelf of rock far back from the water, and with a paltry harem of three mild-eyed but more or less dilapidated little mates. These three, captured, after ferocious battles, from two of the neighbouring bulls, had suffered much mishandling in the contest over their submissive charms, and their usually

sleek coats showed a wear and tear that would have daunted the cleverest furrier of the Rue de la Paix.

Remembering, therefore, all the price he had paid for being late, this bull of the fur seals had early grown restless in the purple southern seas, and turned his face northward betimes. Up along the steep and thundering coasts of California and Oregon, through the tremendous Pacific rollers, he swam steadfastly, now darting like a fish, now gliding at terrific speed with a sinuous, oily succession of fine curves, as if making of his whole pliant body a mighty screw to propel him through the water. For the most part, intent upon his journey, he swam at some little distance below the surface, thrusting up his whiskered muzzle from time to time to breathe, and catching as he went, in those teeming seas, fish enough to satisfy even his unsleeping appetite for fish. But every now and then he and his fellow-voyagers — for he had the company of other wise bulls on his northward quest — would stop and spend some precious time in basking or lazy play under the seductive spring sun, as if, for the moment, a wave of oblivion had swept over their brains, and they

had forgotten the urgency of their purpose.

In the main it was a care-free journey, this migration of the advance-guard of the seal. All full-grown bulls, fierce and agile, their bodies, some six feet or more in length, one mass of lithe and corded muscle, they had few enemies to fear even in those dangerous southern waters. No shark could catch them unless through carelessness of their own; and with his superior speed and his marvellous suppleness in dodging, a great bull seal was capable of making things more or less unpleasant for the clumsy shark. He dreaded, however, that lightning-swift and merciless assassin, the sword-fish, flashing up out of the deeps without warning. And he was always keenly on the watch for that black-and-white shape of doom, the dreadful orca, or "killer" whale. The worst enemies of the northward-moving seals, however — those unscrupulous marauders, the poaching pelagic sealers — left him and his fellows severely alone, because his fur, coarse and battle-scarred, was valueless. These rascals were far behind, waiting for the sleek young cows and for the rich-furred two-year-old and three-year-old young bulls — the

"bachelors," as they are called by the hunters of the seal.

But though no pirate poachers approached to harass his journey, before he had passed beyond the long stretch of the British Columbian coast, the big seal got one serious fright. Somewhere off the Queen Charlotte Islands a Canadian Government cutter, little, but busy and keen as a terrier after rats, steamed in among the herd. The big bull dived deep, straight down into the dim green glimmer, terrified by the darting black bulk and the fiercely churning screw, and the rest of the herd scattered in panic. But not before the Canadian commander had had time to satisfy himself that this was but the advance-guard of old bulls, and that he must seek *his* quarry, the poaching sealers, further to the south.

After this, the big seal swerved far to the westward, following the vast sweep of the Alaskan coast. In his growing eagerness, he kept to the very forefront of the vanguard, and so, rounding the tip of Alaska, he passed through the chain of the Aleutian Islands, where they stretch out like stepping-stones toward the neighbour continent, and came into the shallow tides of Bering Sea. Hitherto,

his journey had been singularly uneventful; but just here he ran into an adventure that came near bringing his career to an abrupt, inglorious end.

In the estuary of a bleak Arctic stream he encountered a vast shoal of salmon heading up for the spawning-beds. It was one of those occasions when the most self-contained of seals might be pardoned for a flurry of excitement. The whole herd went wild. It was the Feast of the Salmon. Through the packed, silvery shoal the great, lithe, black, glistening bodies darted hither and thither, killing, in a sort of delirium, many times more than they could devour, till the pallid, murky flood was stained in wide patches to a watery pink. Here and there a narrow black head, fiercely whiskered, and surmounting a long, massive neck of tremendous power, would thrust itself high above the seething waters, gripping a fat, convulsive salmon in its jaws. As if in sheer wantonness of destruction, the shining fish would be bitten clean in two, one mouthful gulped, and the bleeding fragments dropped into the water. Then the riotous fisherman would plunge for a new prey. It was a bad hour for the salmon. Along the nearer shore of the estuary prowled

certain leisurely white bears, who would plunge into the thronged tide, pick out their prizes, and carry them ashore to be devoured at ease. But the hordes of salmon, urged on by an inexorable desire, never swerved or halted, and their numbers were so incalculable that not all the assaults of seal and bear combined seemed to diminish them in the least.

In the exuberance of his play with the salmon, the big seal chanced to trespass on the none too amiable repose of a strange-looking sea-creature which was rolling sluggishly from side to side on the muddy bottom. This beast, of a pale, corpse-like colour, and some twelve feet in length, suggested some past *mésalliance* between a unicorn and a porpoise. From the middle of its huge, blunt snout protruded, to a length of fully six feet, a massive, keenly-pointed, curiously-twisted tusk of hardest ivory. Its cold, little, pig-like eyes regarded indifferently the myriads of the salmon passing above it, because, for the time, its giant appetite was sated with salmon.

The water of the estuary, at this point, was not more than ten or twelve feet deep; and it chanced that the big seal, in one of his reckless plunges, slapped the narwhal rudely

across the snout with his hind flippers. Possibly the narwhal, at that moment, was suffering from incipient indigestion. His temper was certainly light on the trigger. In a sudden fury he darted upwards. The seal, out of the corner of his eye, saw the rise of that pale bulk, though it was almost imperceptible in the turbid water. He writhed aside, doubling upon himself like an eel; and he was barely in time. That fine lance of ivory missed, indeed, his vitals, but it ploughed a red gash up his side, just behind the fore-flipper.

With the ferocity of his rush, the narwhal shot his tusk and half his body out of the water. The seal, in a rage at the attack, darted at him as he came down, and slashed him savagely across the pig-like eye. Then, realizing, perhaps, that his assailant's armour of blubber was too thick for his teeth to do much with, he glided off and was lost among the salmon while the narwhal sank back heavily to his interrupted digestion on the mud.

It was an almost windless morning, under a pale, low sun, when the big seal came to that particular island of the Pribilov group which he had been holding in his mind's eye all

through the northward journey. The coast — nay, the whole island — was barren and bleak beyond depiction, but the point where the seal floundered ashore and pre-empted his claim had certain advantages which his kind was quick to appreciate. Not half a mile off shore lay another flat island, long and narrow, which served as a breakwater against the heavy seas of the open. Moreover, in the channel between there were always plenty of fish, and the water came deep right up to the lip of the ledge on which he had established himself.

As he landed, he was followed at once, all along the wide curve of the ledge, by the throngs of his fellow-travellers. And instantly the Polar stillness, which had been breathless as death, was shattered with harsh, barking roars and grunting yells as the new arrivals wrangled savagely over their holdings.

Here the big bull made himself immediately at home, his roof the sky, his house walls the four winds, his floor a gently-sloping space of rock that not the maddest Arctic storm would be able to jar. How desirable a holding he had taken up was promptly proved to him. He had not been five minutes in possession before he had to fight for it. Another bull, even

bigger than himself, grizzled about the muzzle, and with the welt of an old wound white across his face, flounced up the ledge and flung himself in fury upon the householder. From the indignant confidence of the attack, it was, perhaps, the previous season's tenant, strong in imagined rights. But, on those wild ledges, no rights hold but those which might can prove. With a roar, the householder elongated and reared aloft his curious, loose-knit frame, and came down upon the intruder with demoralizing force.

The householder had the advantage of position, being the higher on the slope. His hind flippers, broad, short, and powerful, and turned forward, like the hind limbs of a land quadruped, instead of helplessly backward, like those of the eastern seals, gave him a secure base for his attack. He slashed his opponent mercilessly at the first stroke, and bore him back to the very lip of the ledge. The intruder was bulky and powerful, however, and made good his foothold. And here, for some minutes, the battle hung in doubt. The well-matched adversaries roared their angry defiance as they fought, while their nearest neighbours clamoured in sympathy.

Their mighty necks, glistening in the level sunbeams, twisted this way and that, their heads darting almost too swiftly for the eye to follow, as they slashed at each other's throats and parried the deadly strokes with wide-open jaws. At last that superior fire and energy which had enabled the householder to be first of all the herd to arrive began to overmaster his foe's superior weight. The intruder was suffering heavily, and all at once, either losing his nerve for a moment, or weakened by his wounds, he was overbalanced and hurled into the water. Leaning from the ledge, and waving his head sinuously, the householder waited for the battle to be renewed. But the intruder had had enough. For one moment he thrust his head high above the water and eyed his enemy. Then, diving, he swam off in dejection, and took up a place on the exposed outskirts of the settlement.[1]

Within the next four-and-twenty hours the householder had four more battles to fight in order to make good his title to his holding. But none of these later contests were equal to the first in severity. Then, fortunately for his

[1] The settlement of the fur seals on their breeding-grounds is called a "rookery."

bleeding flanks, life became less strenuous as the rookery settled down.

Nevertheless, though the big seal now got a chance to rest and recover his breath, the price of his repose was eternal vigilance. Late-comers kept arriving, swimming up to the ledge and threatening to challenge his occupancy of the choice location. But, sprawling close to the lip of the rock, his bleeding bulk in plain view, his mighty neck swaying alertly, his big, intelligent eyes agleam with savage watchfulness, he presented so formidable and prepared a front that his would-be challengers usually reconsidered, and swam on to look for an easier venture. If any did try to land, the householder was down upon them before they could gain a footing, and they got away with their gashes as best they might. Then there were his immediate neighbours, two big, aggressive bulls, to guard against. They had secured good locations of their own, but they were always threatening to encroach on the boundaries which he had established for himself. These boundaries were, indeed, perhaps a bit over-ample, but the householder was planning for a large household, to make up for his failure of the previous season. And

with vehement barking and roaring he warned back every attempt at encroachment.

A curious part of the situation was that the ceaselessly-harassed householder had now no time to eat. Had he left his post for a moment, he would have found it occupied on his return, and been compelled to fight a doubtful battle for its recapture. Not a dozen paces from his nose there was plenty to eat — fat fish swarming in the icy, green sea — but he could not go and catch them. In this, to be sure, he was no worse off than his fellows and rivals. Every bull who had secured a decent place had to give all his time and attention to the guarding of it.

It was now about the first of May, and for five or six weeks, through the long, pale glare of the interminable Arctic day, with the low sun swinging around the horizon and hardly more than dipping beneath it, the householder never broke his fast. He hardly dared to sleep, even, lest some audacious young new-comer should steal a march on him. Fortunately, he was fat, from his winter of good feeding and easy living, and the store of firm blubber beneath his hide kept his vital forces well nourished.

About the end of the month began to arrive the sleek and amiable hordes of the "half-bulls" and the "bachelors," too young as yet to mate, or even to aspire to such a responsibility. With them came a host of the little, mild-eyed, yearling cows, playful children of the sea. To all these thronging innocents the old bulls paid no attention whatever. They swarmed ashore on the outskirts of the rookery, pleased with whatever quarters they could get, and passed their heedless hours — when not engrossed with the business of fishing — in gambolling as joyously as a lot of children just let out from school.

And then, at last, in the first week of June, came the long-looked-for event for which all this householding and watching and fighting and fasting were but the preparation — the arrival of the full-grown cows.

They arrived in ever-increasing detachments, crowding upon each other's flippers.

As the cows are full-grown at two years old, and the bulls not till the age of seven, and as the females, moreover, are born in greater numbers than the males, they outnumber the adult bulls by ten or twelve to one. Nevertheless, there was not a bull in the herd but

was quite sure there would never be enough to "go around."

The first two cows to arrive came swimming, one a foot or two behind the other, straight for the ledge of our harassed but triumphant householder, who awaited them with agitated head reaching and darting as far as possible out over the water. The cow of the fur seal is far smaller than her polygamous and domineering lord, soft-eyed and mild-mannered. As the leading swimmer reached the ledge, before she had time to scramble up of her own accord, the householder grabbed her unceremoniously by the scruff of the neck, and helped her ashore with more vigor than tact. That uncompromising grip of his teeth upon her neck must have been painful, but the little cow seemed to take it as evidence of devotion, for she made no complaint. Her sudden spouse, however, took no time to court, or even to admire, his glistening bride. Thrusting her behind him, he wheeled like a flash to extend the same gallant attention to her sister-voyager. But he was too late. His energetic neighbour on the right had forestalled him just in time, and successfully dragged off the unreluctant fair to grace his own hearth.

Roaring with disappointment and jealousy, the householder floundered over his boundary to reclaim what he counted his own. But, as he did so, a backward glance showed his neighbour on the left coming to steal the bride whom he had already secured. For an instant he wavered, in an agony of indecision. But the faithless little cow, making no effort to follow him, seemed shamelessly indifferent to the prospect of a sudden change of lords. So he flounced furiously back to her side, and stood guard above her with gaping jaws; and the would-be thief, who had already more than once tasted the householder's mettle, had the discretion to back off.

By this time the cows were arriving in such numbers that every big seal had enough to do in capturing those which came within his reach, without trying to rob his neighbours. The householder, alert and untiring, succeeded, during the next forty-eight hours or so, in grabbing and installing no fewer than a score and half of mild-eyed little mates, who huddled meekly on the ledge behind him, and watched admiringly his herculean efforts to add to their number. They were not troubled by jealousy. Most of them, perhaps, were proud to belong to

a well-stocked harem, whose numbers attested the fighting powers of their lord. Two, to be sure, did allow themselves to be lured off — while the householder was busy helping new arrivals ashore — by an improvident young bull in the rear ranks, who had hitherto been unable to secure a mate. But, for the most part, there was a something in the grip of the householder's jaws on their necks which they could not forget. It proved him a masterful lover, and subdued any impulse to stray.

For some days the belated companies of the cows kept straggling in, and the householder, his good fortune in the way of opportunity never failing him, presently found himself at the head of a harem of over forty members. For his great heart and broad ambitions it was none too many, but it made him a centre of bitterest enmity. Even his strenuous neighbours on either side of him had no such company on their ledges, and to the rear was a scattered line of young bulls who had come late, and were ever on the look-out for a chance to poach. The householder was so harassed by his honours that he had no time to snatch a wink of sleep; and as for *eating*, that was an indulgence he had not allowed himself for

so long that he had almost forgotten what it was like. Forty wives — and all waiting to be stolen by any stronger or more crafty suitor who might come along! It was something even for the harassed householder to keep them all counted. He kept floundering vigilantly around the huddled throng; and if any one, feeling herself neglected or overlooked, tried to slip off and join some forlorn-looking suitor in the back row, she speedily found that she was not so much forgotten as she had thought. She would be grabbed by the neck, shaken into abject penitence, and thrust back into the centre of the harem. All this, of course, was not accomplished without continual skirmishes, as this or that disappointed trespasser would take courage to show fight. But the householder was so much too strong and clever a fighter for the inexperienced young bulls of the back line, that such skirmishes were always quickly ended.

Within a few days of the arrival of the cows, the woolly, little, baby-faced "pups" began to be born. As the births increased, the troubles of the householder began to diminish a little. As soon as a pup was born in his harem, the mother was safe not to stray. But

trespassers continued to be as dangerous as ever, for those gallant robbers were no shirkers of responsibility, and were always ready to steal mother and pup together. As soon as the young were over their first abject helplessness, the mothers were permitted to leave the harem, strictly by the front door, in order to catch fish and keep up their supply of milk for the little ones, for the householder knew that no cow would now fail to come back. But for himself there was still neither rest nor food. There was nothing for him to do but stay at home, keep awake, watch the little ones of forty wives, and fight off persistent rivals. It was a wearing existence. He was by this time no longer a sleek and well-fed gallant, but a gaunt hideful of bones adorned with unlovely though honourable scars. All his strength and fire, however, remained to him unimpaired, and no rival challenged him without being made to repent it.

But one day there came an enemy whom even the householder's prowess could not defy. The seal-hunters arrived at the rookery. They were not those indiscriminate slaughterers, the poachers, but the legitimate hunters, who came to kill with discretion. They did not

interfere with the old bulls and their breeding households, though the bulls all roared at them dauntlessly. They invaded the playgrounds of the unmated youth, and, sparing the little females, made awful havoc among the half-bulls and the bachelors, till the once happy playground was hideous with the blood and the dead. Yet they were careful to spare a good percentage of even the unhappy bachelors, in order that the profitable tribe of the fur seals might not be killed out.

Among the seal-hunters came a thoughtful man, whose purpose was not to kill, but to observe. He did not like the killing. His inquiring nose wrinkled with aversion as he eyed the slaughter for a moment to see just how it was done. Then he turned away in some haste to study the rest of the rookery, to shoot at it with his camera, and to find out how the fur seal conducted itself when more interestingly employed than in being killed. Slowly he made his way along behind the rookery, heedless of threats and roars and snapping jaws, and halting at every other step to level his lens and click his shutter. At last, filled with enthusiasm and facts, he came behind the ledge where the war-worn

householder guarded his harem of forty fair. This immense family and its towering guardian caught the observer's eye. Here, indeed, was a household to be made a note of. First he snapped it from a distance. Then he determined to invade its crowded privacy and study its home arrangements. Avoiding, without much heed, the angry bulls of the rear line, with their meagre harems, he made his way fearlessly right in among the shrinking cows and the round-eyed, trusting pups of the householder's family. He had been seeing so many seals killed, and so easily, that he had acquired a mistaken idea of that creature's courage. Ignoring the harsh warning of the householder, he stooped down to examine and fondle one of the pups, which gazed up at him fearlessly with eyes of pathetic depth and softness.

Now, the householder knew very well what this stranger was — the invincible Man, subjugator of all beasts, able to kill instantly and invisibly or with darting flame. But he had no hesitation; he took no account of risks in defending his hearth. An awkward but dangerous figure, he came lunging valiantly to the attack.

Just in the nick of time the man looked up, to see the ragged bulk descending upon him. He leapt wildly, dropping his camera, and escaped the fatal slash of his assailant's jaws. But one great flipper struck him, and he fell headlong, half stunned, over the back of a protesting cow. Fortunately for him, the householder paused to crush the camera, and the man, shaking his head in a half-dazed way, had time to recover himself sufficiently to meet the next floundering assault. The only weapon he carried was a heavy knotted stick, which served him both as walking-stick and club. As he sprang aside, he caught his adversary a stiff blow on the nose — the most vulnerable point of a seal — and the householder collapsed like a punctured tire.

The man looked down with compunction on his fallen foe, picked up the wreck of his camera, patted a pup that would not get out of his way, and withdrew. When he had passed the rear line of bulls, he looked back, and saw, to his infinite satisfaction, that his stroke had been less effective than he had feared. The householder, slowly recovering, was lifting up his dauntless head, scanning his family to see that none were stolen, and once

more, though still somewhat faintly, roaring his defiance to all comers. When, a few days later, the satisfied hunters left the island, the householder could not but feel that he himself had been the cause of their departure. As there was no one to dispute his theory, it is not strange that he found it satisfying.

Some six weeks later, toward the end of July, the pups being by this time strong enough to travel, and the pangs of his prolonged fast having grown unbearable, the householder and all his rivals came suddenly to the conclusion that it was not worth while striving at such cost to hold their harems together. They remembered that next year they might hope to gather others just as interesting. And all at once, their fiercest feuds forgotten, they plumped into the water and began hungrily chasing fish. Presently all turned their faces southward, and soon the bleak ledges were left solitary once more to confront the storm and cold of the oncoming Arctic night.

Ishmael of the Hemlocks

AN Ishmael indeed, his fangs and his claws were against every other dweller of the wilderness, great or small. And every other dweller of the wilderness was against him — the small and weak with an unsleeping terror, and even the powerful with a hate that was not unmixed with dread. The bear himself, serenely scornful of much larger foes, condescended to regard him with a vigilant animosity. Only the giant moose ignored him utterly, and stalked through the forest unconscious of his presence.

Yet this creature that was able to win himself the tribute of so much fear and so much hate, this Ishmael of the hemlocks, was no bigger than a bobcat or a fox. Among the backwoodsmen and the trappers he was known by various names. The most common of these was "the fisher," though why he should be so called was something of a mystery, his prowess as a fisherman being much inferior

even to that of the racoon, and, of course, in no way to be compared with the skill of such experts as the mink or the otter. He was known also as the "black cat," though he was not black, and neither was he a cat. That he should have been so inappropriately named, however, is perhaps not so surprising as it seems at first glance. His personality was not one that lent itself to exact or intimate observation; and such information as men were able to pick up in regard to him was quite apt, in the long run, to prove mistaken.

A member of the great and redoubtable *Mustela* family, this Ishmael of the hemlock glooms had all the lightning agility and ferocious courage of his little cousin, the weasel, together with the merciless craft and much of the astonishing muscular strength of his bulkier kinsman, the hated wolverine, or "Injun devil." Though hardly more than three feet in length, from his sharp, cruel muzzle to the tip of his handsome, bushy tail, by reason of the incredible swiftness and savagery of his attack he was more than a match for the most powerful of foxes, or for any dog of less than twice his size. The few adversaries whom he was forced to recognize as

outclassing him in strength he could generally manage to overreach by craft.

It was in a dark and tangled hemlock wood that Ishmael had his retreat, where the sombre evergreens shut out the sun in winter as in summer, and fallen, decaying trunks made the earth a labyrinth of tortuous runways and unexpected hiding-places. This was his chosen domain, for he climbed like a squirrel, and it was all the same to him whether he travelled on the ground or by way of the swaying tree-tops. But, thanks to his all-too-effective methods of hunting, game was no longer very abundant in the hemlock wood, and he was wont to forage far afield. Running soundlessly as a mink and tirelessly as a wolf, he would cover enormous distances between the evening and the morning red. Being no respecter of bounds, he poached impartially on all preserves, challenging every other marauder of the forest to the contest of either strength or cunning. And all day, amid the sombre green shadows of the hemlocks, he would sleep, curled up like a peaceful tabby, in the heart of a hollow trunk. He was fond of sleep. His tremendous energies required a lot of it. And this was fortunate for the

other forest kindreds, who were thus enabled to go all day freely hither through the hemlock glooms, on their furtive affairs intent, without fear of the dreaded sleeper in his tree. But, when dusk fell, even the nimble wood-mice were shy of the neighbourhood; and the wild rabbits, who were Ishmael's chief dependence for his daily diet, fled to the more open hard-wood ridges for their moonlight revellings. Even that implacable litter killer, the weasel, forbore to hunt in the hemlock wood. For he knew that Ishmael would not only hunt him — perhaps for sheer delight in the difficult chase — but would even devour his rank and stringy flesh, tough as whipcord, which none of the other forest prowlers would touch unless in the extremest pangs of hunger.

On a certain spring evening, when the light of an early-rising moon silvered the hemlock tops even before the last of the sunset had faded from the sky, Ishmael awoke with an unusual appetite. He came gliding forth somewhat hurriedly, and took not his usual time to stretch himself on the long, slanting trunk which led down from his hole. On the previous night he had fed exclusively on rabbit, and rabbit meat has this peculiarity — that,

as the woodsmen say, it does not "stand by one." After ever so hearty a meal of it, one is soon hungry again; so that they who feed on that flesh must feed often, which is, perhaps, a provision of Nature, that the prolific family of the rabbits shall not be allowed to overrun the earth.

As Ishmael emerged upon his ladder, a hollow, booming voice cried suddenly through the tree-tops. It was a dreadful voice, and it sounded very near, though with a vagueness that made it impossible to say just where it came from. Ishmael knew that menacing voice very well; but, paying no heed to it whatever, he ran on down the sloping trunk. The great horned owl, the terror of all the lesser prowlers of the night, had no terrors for him.

But this winged marauder, as it chanced, was a new-comer — a migrant from those partially-settled districts south of the Ottanoonsis Valley, where the fishers, who loathe the habitations and neighbourhood of man, never ranged. He was unacquainted with Ishmael. His wide, pale, staring eyes saw a furry shape glide down the trunk. As the gliding shape came out into a patch of moonlight, he half

closed his downy wings above his back, and swooped upon it soundlessly. Just as he did so, Ishmael looked up with a wide-mouthed snarl. There was something in that snarl so terrible that the great owl realized he had made a mistake. With a violent flap he veered aside. But it was a close thing for him. Ishmael's lithe neck shot out, and his fangs sank into the owl's padded thigh. He got no more, however, than a mouthful of very downy feathers, and the discomfited bird, flapping hastily away from so dangerous a proximity, left him furiously pawing at his mouth to rid himself of the clinging, exasperating fluff.

Reaching the ground, Ishmael ran on in an evil temper. He was not expecting game in that neighbourhood, so he went in haste, travelling in long, noiseless leaps, the very embodiment of force and speed and precision. But in order not to miss any opportunity which the chances of the chase might throw in his way, he went with his nose held high, alert to catch any passing scent.

Emerging from the hemlock glooms, he entered a region of young second growth, where thickets of half-grown fir and spruce

intermingled with patches of birch, poplar, maple, and cherry. Here, on a sudden, a strong scent drew across his nostrils. He stopped as if shot, and stiffened to instant rigidity, half erect, muzzle held high, while his keen nose questioned the air in every direction. The scent was that of a porcupine, and it was so fresh, so insistent, that he knew the prickly rodent must be close at hand. His implacable eyes, sharp and close-set, peered all about him. At last, glancing upwards he caught sight of a dark ball swaying far out on the slender bough of a tall birch tree.

Now the porcupine is a quarry which the rest of the forest hunters are loath to meddle with. His deadly quills, sharp as needles, and so armed with tiny barbs that, once fixed, they will work their way ever inwards inexorably till they reach, perhaps, a vital spot, are a peril which only starvation itself will drive the weasel, the fox, or the lynx to face. But Ishmael had the secret of dealing with porcupines, and he knew that the flesh beneath that dangerous armour was strong and satisfying. He was up the birch tree and out upon the swaying branch before the heavy-witted porcupine had any suspicion of his approach.

Very cautiously now Ishmael crept out along the slender branch, which bent low under the increasing weight. Perhaps wondering why he had suddenly grown so much heavier, the porcupine slowly turned, to climb back to a less precarious support. Before he was much more than half-way around, he found himself confronted, at a distance of a few inches, by the silent, deadly face of Ishmael, crouched low on the branch.

Instantly every quill of the porcupine's defences stood erect; but his position was one so awkward that he could not immediately coil himself up into that ball of needle-points which all his foes so dreaded. Convulsively he strove to get his naked, unprotected face curled down between his paws. But the doom before him struck too quickly. Ishmael's head darted forward, swift and straight as a rattler's, shot in under the threatening frontlet of barbs, and fixed inexorable fangs in the porcupine's nose.

At the same instant, knowing all the possible dangers of the situation, Ishmael began to back briskly up the branch. The porcupine struggled to double upon himself, in order to strike at his enemy with his armed and powerful

tail. He was being dragged along too rudely for that. Digging in his claws and holding back with all his strength, he struggled to resist his captor and to wrench his bleeding muzzle free. But he was jerked forward so savagely that his scant wits all but forsook him.

The evening twilight, mysterious with its mingling of sunset and moonrise, had hitherto been voicelessly still, except for the occasional solemn twanging note of a night-hawk, swooping across the violet dome of sky. Now, however, the peace was broken by a hideous confusion of sounds, suppressed but desperate. Except to one immediately beneath the tree, the struggle was unseen. But the fierce rattling of branches, the breathless, grunting squeaks, the tearing of claws dragged remorselessly from their hold on the bark, were eloquent of tragedy.

Reaching the crotch of the bough, Ishmael braced his lithe hind-quarters securely upon the main trunk, and with a sudden jerk swung the porcupine clean off his feet, dashing him violently against a branch below. Half stunned and wholly bewildered, the wretched victim laid back all his quills as he swung there, and clawed frantically for a footing.

Ishmael allowed him almost to gain one, and then, as he hung thus extended and defenceless, loosed hold upon his nose and caught him by the throat. The victim's struggles at once grew feebler, and in a few moments ceased altogether. When he hung quite limp, Ishmael let go, and the body dropped to the ground. Following it with a rush, lest some other hunter should forestall him, Ishmael carefully turned it over upon its back, — knowing that all the under-parts were soft and unprotected — and fell to his meal.

Having eaten all he could, with the confidence of an ever-successful hunter, he left the remnants indifferently for whoever might come by, and betook himself to the high and ample crotch of a neighbouring beech tree. Here he proceeded to make a careful toilet, cleansing his fine fur scrupulously till not a trace of his late sanguinary adventure remained. Then, as wide awake and as keen for the chase as if he had had nothing to eat for hours, he slipped down from the beech tree and raced on through the moon-silvered stillness.

Presently across the stillness came the light babble of running water. As if at the

sound a memory had flashed upon him, he swerved sharply aside, and in a few seconds came out upon a little grassy meadow on the shores of a shallow brook which sang softly over its pebbles. But Ishmael was not thirsty. He paid no heed to the water, but went sniffing about among the herbage, till presently he found what he was looking for. Straightway he fell to rolling himself over and over in it, and biting at it in a sort of ecstasy. What he had found was a bed of catnip, for which herb he had all the semi-delirious passion of the cats themselves.

Having satiated himself with this luxury, Ishmael kept on up the stream, his nose held high, as usual, but the keenness of his scent somewhat blunted, for the moment, by the pungency of the catnip. It was because of this, perhaps, that, on whisking around a huge half-rotten stump, he ran plump into a big black bear which was grubbing for beetles in the rich mould. The bear made a furious pass at him with her gigantic paw, and Ishmael flashed aside just in time to escape being crushed. Startled and enraged, he darted around the stump, and, reappearing suddenly on the other side, snarled venomously and

made as if to spring at the great beast's throat. He was by no means insane, however; and when the bear lunged forward at him with a grunt of hate, he slipped away like a snake into the undergrowth.

Some five minutes later, while creeping swiftly under the branches of a dense fir thicket, he ran full upon something warm and alive, lying huddled up upon the ground. His nose had not warned him — perhaps because the young of the wild creatures seem, at times, to have a protective lack of scent — and his eyes had not warned him, because the motionless little form, both in colour and in outline, seemed to melt into its surroundings. Nevertheless, Ishmael was not taken by surprise. His practised jaws went instantly and unerringly to this new quarry's throat. There was a sharp bleat of agony and terror, a pathetically brief and feeble beating of awkward limbs. Carefully as its anxious mother had hidden it, the baby fawn too soon had met the doom of the wild.

Ishmael liked venison — young venison — even better than porcupine; so, though he was not exactly hungry, he drank the warm blood greedily, and even managed to partake

of a little solid dessert. While thus pleasantly occupied, however, he kept a sharp look-out for the old doe, whose knife-edged hooves and mother rage would, as he knew, make her dangerous even for him. Suddenly there sounded a brusque swishing and crashing of branches. But it was not the doe that came bursting into the thicket. It was the great black bear. She had followed him up, and now she was come to rob him of his kill.

For a second or two Ishmael went all but blind with fury. He crouched upon his prey, facing the intruder with so malignant a rage that it almost seemed to efface the disparity of their statures. The bear, however, cared nothing for his rage. She lumbered forward and struck swiftly at the small brown beast that was so presumptuous as to withstand her.

The blow, of course, fell on nothing; Ishmael had vanished like a shadow. An instant later the bear felt a piercing pang in the great muscles just above her heel. She wheeled and struck again like lightning. But Ishmael was already gone. He crouched, snarling softly, some dozen feet away, challenging her to pursue.

But the bear, for all her rage, was not to be

lured. The wound she had received was painful enough, to be sure, but it was not grave; her opponent's jaws were not wide enough to inflict serious damage on her great furry limb. She knew that in nimbleness she was no match for the vicious little antagonist that taunted her. And she was hungry. She had two bright-eyed whimsical cubs in her den beneath the rocky lip of the ridge, and their appetites made a demand upon her breasts which a diet of wood-grubs and wild tubers hardly enabled her to satisfy. The flesh of the fawn was a godsend to her. Mumbling indignantly, she fell to her repast, but she kept the while a wary eye on the foe.

Now, Ishmael, as it chanced, knew all about that den on the ridge and its precious occupants. From a safe distance he had surveyed it, gnashing his teeth with malice, but not quite liking to risk the perilous adventure of invading it. Now, however, his rage blotted out his always scant endowment of caution. Even so, his cunning did not quite desert him. He made a final threatening rush at his great adversary, to make sure of attracting her undivided attention, and then, as if daunted at last by the fury of her counter-attack, he

darted away, not too swiftly, in a direction exactly opposite to that which would lead him to the den. Craftily he kept to the moonlit patches of open, and the old bear's eyes followed him suspiciously till he was lost in the confusion of the shadows.

Satisfied at last that he was well beyond eyeshot, he wheeled in his tracks, made a short *détour*, and sped straight for the crest of the ridge.

The old bear had her den in a little cave with a narrow entrance, just where the tilted strata of slate which formed the extremity of Blue Ridge broke off sharply and overhung a deep ravine. Up from the ravine, on the windless air, came the light clamour of Blue Ridge Brook, an unconsidered tributary of the turbulent Ottanoonsis. For some fifteen feet along the face of the steep ran a broken ledge, which led to the entrance of the cave. Full upon the entrance shone now the unclouded moonlight, washing whitely across the straight spires of the fir trees in the valley below.

It was obviously a perilous cul-de-sac, with no back door to retreat by, but Ishmael did not hesitate. He knew that the old bear

was far away, down in the thickets on the other side of the ridge, devouring her stolen meal. He glided along the ledge, his dark, lithe shape conspicuous for a moment in the moonlight. Then he slipped into the cave.

The two glossy cubs, about the size of house cats, were beginning to get hungry. Huddled together at the back of the den, they were whimpering softly to themselves, their small, pointed ears cocked to listen for the shuffle of their mother's returning footsteps, their bright, droll little eyes fixed eagerly on the patch of brightness that filled their doorway. Suddenly they saw, not their mother's huge form, which always blotted out the light, but a low, slender shape, which entered with a graceful, leaping bound. They knew at once that it was deadly, that leaping figure, whose eyes fixed theirs with so steady and cruel a glare; and both set up a shrill, whimpering call for help.

But the two cubs were very different in their tempers, as often happens in the case of animals so variable and so highly individualized as the bear. One of the two faced the peril boldly, a baby paw uplifted to strike, and the thin, black edges of his lips curled back

defiantly from his tiny teeth. The other, appalled on the instant by the menace of those approaching eyes, shivered violently and lost all power of motion.

It was this little unfortunate that first caught Ishmael's eye. Darting straight at its throat, he rolled it over on its back and began tearing it savagely. There was the joy of satisfied vengeance in that kill, and Ishmael, for the moment, forgot his cunning.

A few seconds later he was disturbed by a feeble clawing and nipping at his hind-quarters. The other cub, being of the mettle which recks not of odds, had come valiantly to the aid of his little bed-fellow. With dripping jaws and a furious snarl, Ishmael whipped about to rid himself of this ineffectual assailant. But in that same instant his ears caught the sound of a swift padding on the rocks outside. With one lightning bound, as if his body were all steel springs, he reached the mouth of the cave.

But in the same instant the mother bear, breathless with haste, reached it also. Some shock of instinctive fear had shaken her at the very beginning of her feast, and she had not lingered to think about it — she had come.

One huge paw, with a sweeping stroke, met Ishmael full in the face, crushing his head back between his shoulders and pinning him to the rock. Then the other descended like a pile-driver upon his slender loins. Even in his death-throe Ishmael's jaws worked, biting madly and blindly. But in a second or two it was all over. He lay without a quiver, a shapeless mass of blood and fur beneath the avenger's feet.

The old bear drew back and eyed the body for a moment, then she hurried into the den, whimpering with anxiety. The uninjured cub came sprawling forward to meet her. She gave him a hasty lick and sniff, assuring herself that he was not hurt, and then turned to the dead one. Whining, she sniffed at it, and licked it, and turned it over tenderly with her paw. It was, perhaps, a full minute before she could quite make up her mind that it was dead. When she could no longer doubt the truth, she stopped whining. Lifting the limp little body in her jaws, she carried it outside the cave and laid it down lingeringly on a steep slope of rock. As if this were just what she had planned for, it slipped slowly from its place and fell sprawlingly, rolling over and

over, till it lodged and hung in the branches of an aged spruce some fifty feet below.

The mother did not stay to watch it. Turning back abruptly, she threw herself once more upon the carcase of Ishmael, beating it and rending it with her claws till it resembled nothing that had ever roamed the wilds. Being a fastidious feeder in her way — a lover of honey and fruits and delicate meat — she would not condescend to eat this rank and fibrous flesh. When she had fully wreaked her vengeance upon it, she flung it contemptuously far over the ledge, and withdrew into the cave to suckle her remaining little one. As for what remained of Ishmael, it fell to the bottom of the ravine, there to feed some ancient grudge of fox or wild-cat, or, perhaps, more ignominiously, to make long festival for the scavenger beetles and the blow-flies.

The Spotted Stranger

HE looked curiously out of place in these austere, dark-green, brown-carpeted northern woods of spruce and fir. His bright golden-tawny coat, sown with vivid black spots, made him very conspicuous in the shadowy glooms.

And he felt quite as out of place as he looked. He had never before seen anything like these northern woods. In his native Indian jungle, where the air steamed and quivered, reeking with heavy scents, there was always a riot of hot colour, much golden-yellow of stem and leaf and burnt bamboo mingling with the rank greens and glowing blossoms, and all splashed with thick blotchy shadows under the intense sun. Into such surroundings his own hot colouring had ever blended to a marvel, so that it had been hard for the most vigilant

of eyes to detect him as he went prowling noiselessly in search of his prey. But here he felt himself naked to every observer. Half angry, half afraid, his powerful tail lashed jerkily from side to side as he crept along, belly to earth, his fierce eyes glancing this way and that in search of either a quarry or a hiding-place.

He was hungry, this lean Indian leopard; but a place wherein to conceal himself and rest, while taking stock, so to speak, of his new surroundings, was even more important to him than food. His nerves were still quivering from the shouts and screams, the choking smoke, the blinding glare, the flames that had seemed to pounce and lick hungrily after him, and all the maddening uproar of the fire which had destroyed the circus and set him free. He did not know that he owed his escape to a kindly attendant who had opened his cage in the turmoil, only to be knocked down and terribly clawed in his wild plunge for safety. He hardly knew, or he remembered but confusedly, how in his flight through the settled country he had been shot at, chased by yelping dogs, charged by a herd of angry and curious cattle, and

all but run down by a roaring locomotive whose speed he had perilously misjudged. All that he quite realized just now was the cool solitude and the silence, and, very keenly, the strange vistas of the tree-trunks, which seemed to be always opening out from him in every direction. They kept him glancing ceaselessly every way at once, in a fashion most exhausting to the nerves. He grew as anxious as a cornered rat for a hole. What he wanted was a place that he could back into, and thence stare out with some sense of security upon this altogether novel and uncomprehended species of world. Savage, crafty, powerful, and confident in his powers, he had little fear of what he knew and understood. But, like most highly-organized creatures with some development of the imagination, he feared the unknown. He wanted to make sure of a fair chance to observe it before undertaking to cope with it.

Yet what seemed to him a solitude was in reality populous enough, had his eyes but been initiated to it. The tiny, grey-brown, elfin shapes of the wood-mice stared at him an instant, then fell back with thin squeaks

of amazement into their burrows under the fir roots. From behind a stump a yellow-brown weasel, of the same hue as the carpet of dead fir needles, glared at him with eyes as wild as his own and far more savagely malignant. Little black-and-white woodpeckers, running up the hemlock trunks, peered around at him curiously, keeping their bodies well out of the range of his baleful stare. The chickadees stopped hunting insects under the bark, and wondered at him as he passed, then flew on ahead, with a fine-drawn *tsic-a-dee-dee-dee*, to get another look at so novel a visitor to the fir forests. And a big porcupine, hanging sleepily in a hemlock branch, glanced down upon him with eyes of supreme indifference.

At last, however, a red squirrel chanced to catch sight of the bright-spotted stranger. Frisking nearer, from branch to branch, he ran half-way down a big trunk, spread legs and tail wide, scrutinized the leopard with his great, luminous, unspeakably insolent eyes, and set up a chatter so shrill that the quiet aisles of the forest rang with it.

Thoroughly startled, the leopard crouched in his tracks, and shrank as if some one had

flicked a whip in his face. Then in a rage he pounced at the impudent little reviler. Of course, the latter was gone in an eye-wink, and his loud mockery shrilled out from the top of the tree. Up went the leopard after him, agile and swift. But almost in the same instant the squirrel was shrieking his insults from the next tree and the next.

Much disgusted, the leopard came down again and resumed his journey. His insulter, he decided, was much too insignificant to be noticed, either as a prey or as a foe. But in this he was mistaken. The noisy abuse of the little red imp brought several more of his kind, equally eloquent; and to swell the clamour came presently some half-dozen blue jays and whisky-jacks, who fluttered and whistled and squealed about the brilliant stranger till his heart was ready to burst with the sheer cold impotence of his rage. To be sure, he had known something not unlike this before, when, in his own jungle, he had been baited and reviled by a throng of gibbering monkeys. In that case he had at last succeeded in catching one of his revilers and eating him — a most consoling form of vengeance. But his present tor-

mentors were so little and elusive that he could indulge himself in no such hope.

At last, however, he came to a sort of tangle of rock overgrown with brambles, bracken, and birch saplings, and therein he presently found a crevice which almost amounted to a cave. Crawling into it, he turned around and lay down with a vast sense of relief. The retreat was so small that his head came out to the very entrance, making his concealment somewhat incomplete. But at least no mysterious enemy could now come upon him from the rear. His front he would make shift to defend against all comers.

As soon as he was settled, he curled his great paws demurely under his chin, shut his eyes to the narrowest thread-like slits, and appeared to sleep. Encouraged by this indifference, his tormentors flocked down among the bracken, almost under his nose. He took no notice. The jays became particularly audacious, screaming and hopping up with lifted wings, and cocking their bright eyes at him in unmeasured derision. At last one alighted within a couple of feet of his very muzzle. For a fraction of a

second the rash bird saw a pair of immense pale eyes that opened suddenly upon her. Then a spotted paw shot forth, swift as light, and she was but a flattened bunch of bright blue feathers under it.

With an outburst of hysterical shrieks, the whole mob, squirrels and all, took themselves off. The stranger, blinking with satisfaction, devoured the meagre prize, and wiped the feathers from his chaps with both paws.

The clamour of jay and squirrel having died away, the stranger lay looking out quietly upon his new domain. For a long time nothing stirred. But the forest soon forgets. In a little while the leopard marked a curious figure prowling between the trunks some forty or fifty paces from his hiding-place. He saw at once that it was some kind of a cat, but with strange, high, humped hindquarters, a mere stub of a tail, and a very large round face, fiercely ruffed and whiskered. It was not as large as himself, by any means; but, all the same, it was so formidable-looking that he thought best not to go out and try conclusions with it — at least, not till he should come to feel a little better acquainted. Such an enterprise

as that could wait. Even as he was coming to this conclusion the lynx picked up his trail. At that great footprint and menacing, unknown scent, the grim prowler stopped short. For a moment he sniffed at the trail inquiringly, the long hair lifting slowly along his back. Then with pale, wide eyes he swept an apprehensive glare about him, and went off with huge, noiseless leaps through the grey trunks.

The leopard blinked again, and opened and shut his great claws like a gratified cat. He was beginning to stand less in awe of this strange northern world.

The lynx had not been more than five minutes gone when a brown rabbit came leaping excitedly through the bracken. It appeared to be fleeing from some pursuer. Just in front of the cave it halted, sat up on its haunches, and glanced back nervously, its immense ears apprehensively erect. With one bound, the leopard shot from his doorway and fell upon it. This was a kill worth making, and he cared little what other hunter had been trying for it. As he lay making his meal, a lithe, tawny little shape darted from the bracken, snarled venomously in his

very face, and flashed away before he could put his paw upon it.

After this repast the stranger slept comfortably for an hour or so, and woke up feeling considerably at home with his novel surroundings. It seemed pretty evident that he was going to find good hunting, and he had as yet seen no sign of any creature strong enough or daring enough to challenge his right to it. The forest was now dim with the first purples of the twilight, and he felt himself called to the chase. No longer a nervous fugitive, but master of a snug lair and lord of an apparently limitless range, he stalked forth, stretched himself luxuriously, and wandered off to look for water.

Only a couple of hundred yards beyond his retreat he found it — a low-shored, glassy lake, now glimmering with amber and violet under the last of the sunset. Crouching at the water's edge, he stared up and down the lonely shores as he drank, and then quickly shrank back among the fir trees. He had caught sight of many fine hoof-tracks leading down to the white beach, and realized that there were deer about. The deer were his favourite quarry. He licked his lips and

climbed hastily into a big hemlock conveniently near the trails.

From the deeps of violet sky straight overhead came the long, twanging note of a swooping night-hawk. It was a strange sound to the wanderer from the tropics, and he peered upwards curiously through the branches, unable to make it out. Then his attention was diverted by a sound of footfalls coming down the trail. They were heavy footfalls, which made the dry twigs crackle heedlessly, as if the wayfarer did not care who knew of his comings or his goings. The leopard curled his lips back from his fangs at this manifestation of self-confidence, and drew himself together for a tremendous spring. From the nature of the footfalls his experienced ear told him that it was no pad-footed creature that was approaching, but a hoofed beast of some sort, and he expected a heavy buck, upon whose neck he would fall and tear his throat.

But at sight of the shape which came stalking into his view he changed his mind for the moment. This was not a beast to be challenged lightly.

It was a bull moose, tall and black and im-

posing. His immense and humped shoulders, short, thick neck, and massive, long-snouted head proclaimed the strength of a buffalo; while the fierce, little twinkling eyes, which disdained to keep a look-out for enemies, showed a spirit which would know how to use that strength. His broad, palmated antlers, of vast spread and apparently enormous weight, were such a weapon as the leopard had never before contemplated, and they made a great impression upon him. He could not know, of course, that at this season the antlers were not yet fully developed, but spongy and tender and altogether useless.

The moose strode on down to the water's edge, waded out belly deep, and with noisy splashings began pulling the tough-rooted water-lily stems. The lake was shallow, and he was so far out from shore that the leopard could not observe him very well. Consumed with curiosity, he came down out of his tree, crept to the waterside, and there crouched staring.

Presently the moose, catching sight of that spotted, sinuous form on the beach, stopped pulling lilies and stared haughtily

in return. The longer he stared, the less he seemed to like the stranger's looks. First he snorted his distaste, loudly and unmistakably; then he came splashing heavily shoreward to give more forcible expression to his dislike. For a moment or two the leopard stood his ground, as if ready to try conclusions at once with this formidable rival; then, thinking better of it, he withdrew slowly up the beach. The moose, quite unimpressed either by his dignity or by his look of dangerous power, came ashore with a rush and charged after him, all dripping.

With a harsh snarl, the leopard wheeled and crouched to spring. To his amazement, the great black beast, instead of coming at him head down as he expected, danced forward, striking out swiftly with great battering fore-hooves, whose edges would cut like steel. Confounded by such an unheard-of mode of attack, which he did not know how to meet, the leopard sprang lithely aside and ran up his hemlock tree. Apparently much surprised at this performance, the moose stopped short and stood for some moments staring and snorting. Then he shook himself long and well, turned his

back, wriggled his meagre little tail contemptuously, and loitered off into the woods, browsing as he went.

In a very ugly mood after this discomfiture, the leopard dropped presently from his perch and crept stealthily homeward. He would wait till later in the night for his deer-hunting. In his breast rankled a savage hate for the big black beast which had so outfaced him, and he studied for his revenge. It was in this unconsidering frame of mind that he encountered a little black-and-white creature, hardly so big as a rabbit, which crossed his path, and paused to look at him with leisurely curiosity.

Had he been cooler, the mere fact that a creature so tiny did not seem to fear him would have been enough in itself to make him pause and investigate. There was something altogether unnatural in such an attitude; but instead of taking warning, he was only the more enraged by what seemed to him an unparalleled piece of impudence. He pounced with a snarl. At the same instant something terrible struck him full in the face. It was blinding, suffocating, indescribable. With a strangling cry he jerked

himself backwards; and the little striped thing, slipping out unhurt from almost between his paws, strolled off calmly among the bushes. It was a great piece of bad luck for the spotted stranger from India that he had never been taught anything about skunks.

With that strangling horror in his eyes and nostrils — viscous, clinging, all-pervasive — it was some seconds before the leopard could draw breath. Then he went into a paroxysm, pawing frantically at his face and rolling in the moss and ferns. The pawing did no good, so at last he took to rooting deep through the moss and down into the cool, moist mould beneath. Instinctively he had found his way to Nature's own remedy for his trouble. Fresh earth is the best antidote and the best cleanser for it. In a few minutes he could draw his breath fairly, and make shift to see; but to get himself clean, that was another matter. And, oh, how he hated himself! As soon as he could see clearly enough, he went racing though the woods in a crazy effort to escape from that overpowering smell. He was fairly exhausted before he came to realize that he was carrying

it with him. Then, returning somewhat to his senses, he scratched a big hole in the moist earth, and fell to rolling, burrowing, and wallowing in it. When that wallow was too thoroughly infected to be of any use, he went on and dug himself another, and yet again another. By the time the first of the dawn had begun to steal coldly through the forest, he had reached the conclusion that there was nothing more to be done. Thereupon he made an elaborate toilet, pawing and licking himself like a cat, till at last he managed to persuade himself that he was once more clean. As a matter of fact, however, he still carried upon his fur — as he would for days — a pungent and sickening reminder of his insignificant-looking but terrible little foe.

Bitter as had been the experience, the leopard forthwith began to reap a certain substantial benefit from it. His own scent, which most of the wild creatures found so terrifying, was for the time thoroughly disguised. The rabbits, always curious, would not allow him to come quite within leaping distance before taking alarm. Because he smelled like a skunk, they stupidly concluded

that he could leap no further than a skunk. The deer, too — it was surprising how easy they were to stalk, so long as they were not allowed to catch sight of him. If they saw him, of course they did not stop to investigate. They knew nothing of leopards, these Canadian deer, but they had an ominous tradition of panthers in the family; and they had wit enough to know that what looked like a panther with spots was not improbably quite as dangerous as one without that adornment.

Full fed on rabbit and deer meat, and his nostrils at length somewhat blunted to the unsavoury scent which everywhere accompanied him, during the next four or five days the leopard grew very well content with his surroundings. The one fly in his ointment was the great bull moose. Day after day, from some secure concealment, he observed the arrogantly indifferent black monster, and bared fang and claw with impotent rage. But never could he quite make up his mind to provoke the perilous encounter. He felt that he might perhaps win by dropping upon the bull's neck from some convenient branch. But then, again,

he felt that he might lose. And the idea of being slashed and stamped down by those great splay hooves, which sometimes clacked so strangely as their owner went by, filled him with discretion. He wisely concluded that the time was not yet ripe for that adventure.

And while he was nursing this grudge, came the day of his great mistake.

Overlooking the lake was a slope of mountain-side covered with patches of blueberry barren, and rising suddenly to a half naked upthrust of grey granite. Thinking perhaps to enlarge the bounds of his range, and perhaps to vary his diet a little with unknown game, the leopard started to explore the nearer slopes.

The blueberries were in their prime here in this high, cold, late-summered region. They clung thick-massed all over the low bushes, bright as globules of lapis-lazuli under the downpour of the sparkling sunlight. Shoulder deep among them the leopard marked a small, glossy-black, chubby animal, who was stripping and gulping down the juicy fruit with loud gulps of satisfaction. Sometimes, as if unable to absorb them fast enough by any other

process, he would sit up on his plump little haunches, grasp the whole top of a loaded bush in his forearms, and fairly wallow his face in it till the purple juices daubed him to the very ears.

The leopard knew at once that this droll and greedy little beast was a bear cub, rolling in fat and exceedingly good to eat. As it happened, he was acquainted with only two kinds of bear — the little, humorous black bear of the Himalayas, courageous enough, but feeble, and the sluggish, inoffensive ant-bear. He was quite ignorant of the temper and the capabilities of the black bear of Eastern Canada. And ignorance is one of those faults which Nature, sternest of parents, is apt at times to punish with the most implacable severity. It is not all her children who are fortunate enough to survive her harsh lessons.

The leopard crouched for a few minutes, watching with narrowed lids the riotous feasting of the cub. Then his appetite and his ferocity overcame him. The cub seemed to be alone, and he had nothing to fear, in any case, from such bears as he knew anything about. Like a great missile of spotted

gold, he hurled himself through the air, fell upon the merry cub, and bit through its neck with one crunch of his powerful jaws. Then, not liking the glare and exposure of the open, he lifted the limp little body and turned to carry it in under the fir trees.

Even as he turned, a great shadow came between him and the sun. Instinctively he bounded aside. But in the very instant that his tense limbs left the ground, a gigantic bulk fell upon him, crushing him back again. With a screech of startled fury, he writhed from under it, one flank flayed to the ribs by the impact of the mother bear's avenging paw. She strove to hold him down with her great weight. But his muscles, lithe as whipcord, had the knit strength of steel, together with a well-nigh unbelievable store of elastic nervous energy. The explosive violence of his contortions almost succeeded in throwing her off — almost, but not quite. Foiled in his effort to break from her deadly clutch, he twisted his body around so that he could bite at her throat and bring his claws into action. Very gladly would he have made his escape

and fled without shame, for this was no such bear as had ever before come within his range of imagination. But, finding escape impossible, he was going to show this monster his mettle. Sinking his foreclaws deep into his assailant's neck, he arched his long, flexible back like a strung bow, and raked her flank and belly with the terrible, eviscerating weapons of his hinder paws.

Breaking for the first time the silence of her avenging rage, the bear gave vent to a loud *wah-ah* of pain and consternation. Such a hideous method of fighting was new to her. Savagely she strove to pluck the spotted beast off, that she might hold him at arm's length and smash him. But he clung like blazing oil. Finding it impossible to fling him off, she changed her tactics, and hugged him to her chest with her tremendous forearms. For a moment or two his tense muscles withstood the terrific pressure, while he continued to rip her with his hind claws. Then, with a gasping screech, he collapsed. Those inexorable arms crushed, constricted, annihilated, till the last breath went out of his lungs, the last pulse of life from his heart, and his lank

hindquarters trailed from that embrace limp as a dead rabbit's.

As she felt the straining body relax in her grip, and the round, flat head fell back with eyes bulging, the bear tore out the exposed throat with her teeth as if to make quite sure of her victory. Then, letting the body drop, she fell on all fours and sniffed and whimpered over the form of her dead little one. Speedily satisfying herself that it was indeed quite dead, she dragged herself away with her shocking wounds to the gloom of some deep thicket, there in solitude to die or to recover as the fates of the wilderness might decree.

The brilliant skin of the dead leopard, spotted with black and splashed thick with crimson, lying there exposed beside the black body of the cub, caught the eye of a white-headed eagle soaring high above the bare granite peak. In wide spirals, on all but motionless wings, he sank lower and lower, till at length he passed close above the bodies, peering down at them with outstretched snowy neck and hard, glassy, black-and-golden eyes. But he did not care to alight, for the spotted stranger looked dangerous to him even in death. Presently he winged away again

beyond the peak, as if to say it was no affair of his. And then, in the stillness, and the warmth, came swarming the flies, shining like jewels, and fearing no dead thing, however strange.

The Feud

THE dog was a handsome, heavily-built nondescript, a mongrel, but a mongrel of distinguished blends. Muzzle and ears and the aristocratic dome of the skull showed the large strain of hound in his ancestry. The wavy, red-gold coat and feathering of tail and legs told of the Irish setter in his line, while the bowed and shortened legs, the massiveness of chest and shoulder, were eloquent of the incongruous dash of bull. With such warring elements in his blood, his temper, as may be imagined, was none too certain; but his intelligence kept him from letting it get him into serious trouble, while his fidelity and courage, as well as his striking appearance, led the farmer who owned him to set great store by him. As a watch-dog he was the terror of the tramps, who, after vain efforts to cajole him into complaisance or lure him with poisoned

tit-bits, came to give his neighbourhood a wide berth.

But in spite of his duties as a watch-dog, he was by no means always to be found at his post. The farmer had taken no pains to train him to stay at home. He had been brought up quite as casually as he had been bred, and, being an independent backwoods dog, he had no idea at all that his duties required him to be always lounging about the farmyard. Moreover, the strain of Irish setter in his veins made him restless and curious. He was given to ranging the open, hillocky, upland pastures where the surly woodchucks had their holes, or exploring the deep woods down the valley in search of adventure. He was capable of making an adventure out of very insignificant material — a mouse-hole under a root would often suffice to keep him digging frantically for an hour, as if convinced that something wonderful and new lay hidden at the bottom. But his real desire was an adversary that would give him a good fight — something to satisfy the vague but fiery craving in his great jaws and mighty muscles and emulously pugnacious heart.

Driven by this desire, he would follow up the trails of bear and lynx with hopeful and misguided enthusiasm; but, happily for him, the bears and the ripping-clawed Canada lynxes scrupulously kept out of his way. A bear would have made short work of him; and as for the lynx, though he might have come off victorious in the battle, he would have been so ripped by the great cat's eviscerating claws that he would probably have bled to death on the triumphal journey home. But both bears and lynxes eyed him with too much suspicion to think of risking an encounter with him. They had seen him in the company of the farmer and the farmer's gun. Therefore they were always sure that, whenever they saw him alone, the farmer and the farmer's gun must be lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood, ready to pounce out upon them if ever they should be so rash as to attack him.

Of course, both in the woods and in the upland pastures there were other adversaries on whom the dog might have vented his longing for a fight. There were the porcupines, and there were the skunks. But the dog knew too much to want to get himself

stuck full of quills like a pin-cushion full of pins, and his nostrils were too sensitive for him to tolerate the idea of coming to close quarters with a skunk. So, when he encountered either of these indolent and arrogant little prowlers, he gave them the path without shame, and took every care not to ruffle their feelings.

It happened on a certain spring morning, while the green of the birches was still tender and diaphanous, that the vain pursuit of a rabbit led him much further over the uplands than he had been wont to range. He lost the trail at last, turned aside in ill-humour, ran softly over a low, sunny ridge, and came plump among a litter of young foxes playing about their hole.

Three whisking reddish streaks vanished into the hole. But the fourth cub was yawning, with his eyes closed, at the instant of the dog's arrival, and lost precious seconds. He jumped like a loosed spring, but he was just too late. A pair of inexorable jaws closed upon the ruddy brush of his tail, and held him fast.

Baby though he was, he was game, and he curled back to snap savagely at his huge

captor. Another moment, and his neck would have been crushed between the dog's great jaws; but in that same moment the red vixen, his mother, came to his rescue. With a shrill yelp of rage, she hurled herself upon the adversary, and her narrow jaws slashed him deeply in the neck.

Startled at the swift fury of this attack, the dog dropped his prize and turned with a deep growl upon his fiery little assailant. She tried to evade him, but he was too quick for her, and caught her in his grip, while the released cub crept trembling into the hole.

The fatal misfortune for the brave little mother was the strain of bull in her antagonist's pedigree. Had he once let go in order to take a new hold or to bite again in some more deadly part, with her incredible quickness and wiriness she would have twisted free and mockingly eluded him. But he never let go. He simply went on biting and chewing deeper, deeper, and ever deeper. The vixen tore and slashed valiantly, till the dog's rich coat was crimsoned with his blood. But as she was gripped, her fine jaws could not reach him in any vital spot, nor could they bite deep

enough to really divert him. Suddenly her mouth opened wide in a harsh yelp, ending in a gurgle, and her head fell to one side limply. Growling deeply, the victor shook her a little, to make sure she was not shamming. Then dropping her indifferently, he went and sniffed at the hole, and finally trotted away toward home.

It had not been enough of a fight to get his bull blood thoroughly aroused, but out of it were to follow consequences which he little anticipated.

Some ten minutes later the father fox came trotting up to his den. At sight of the body of his mate, sprawled limp before the entrance, he stopped and stood rigid, eyes and ears and nostrils wide with startled question. After perhaps half a minute, he stole forward and sniffed the body over minutely. Then he sniffed at the dog's tracks, while the stiff hair rose on his neck. Lastly, he slipped into the hole and assured himself as to the safety of the young ones. Emerging a minute or two later, he returned to the body of his mate, gave it a hasty, compassionate lick, and started off on the trail of the dog.

II

THE dog lay just outside the farmyard fence, licking his wounds. They were not deep, the jaws of the brave vixen having had so poor an opportunity of doing themselves justice, but they were smarting cuts and numerous, and the dog was feeling very ill-tempered over them.

All was quiet about the farmyard, the men being away at work in the fields, the women-folk busy in the house. Nothing stirred but a few chickens scratching in the straw far at the other side of the yard. Presently the dog, tired of licking his bites, laid his head between his paws and went to sleep. Just as he did so, a large red fox, with a magnificent plumy brush, appeared around the fence corner some forty or fifty feet away, and stood, with one fore-paw uplifted, to eye the dog.

In the narrowed, gleaming eyes of the new-comer there was a look of cold fury, of a set, considering hate that was not going to balk itself by haste. Yet here, it seemed,

was the instant opportunity. The dog's head faced the other way, and he was obviously asleep. The avenger glanced all about him carefully, to assure himself that he was in no danger of being taken by surprise. Then he crept forward, noiseless as thistle-down, on his light and tufted pads.

The avenger was no rash hot-head, ready to sacrifice himself in the uncertain hope of achieving his vengeance. It was his foe alone that he would punish, not himself and the motherless whelps in his den on the uplands. He knew that in a fight he was no match for the dog, who was more than thrice his weight and of fighting breed. Moreover, he understood the dog's method of fighting — that implacable grip that would never let go while life lasted. He had no intention of letting that grip once close upon him. His trust for the vengeance which he was set upon lay in his ingenuity, his keen and far-seeing craft. He did not underrate the dog's intelligence, but he was confident in pitting his own against it.

Within a couple of yards of the dog's hindquarters he paused, gathered his legs beneath him, and then pounced forward like

lightning. His hope was to hamstring his enemy by one lucky slash of his keen jaws. But in the very instant of his leap, the dog moved — perhaps warned by some subtle admonition to ear or nostril — and the assailant's teeth merely ripped a red gash down over his haunch. With a startled snarl, he whipped about to grapple with this unlooked-for assailant. But the fox had leaped back as lightly as he had come, and was now a dozen feet away, staring at him with baleful eyes of challenge.

With a deep growl, the dog gave chase. And the fox fled away before him, not towards the den in the uplands, but straight back towards the forest.

For his weight and build, the dog ran well enough, having sound wind and tireless muscles. But his light and wiry adversary could have left him out of sight in five minutes. This, however, was no part of the fox's plan. With consummate craft, he ran heavily, as if it took all his best effort to keep ahead; and the dog, being too angry to see through this play-acting, was encouraged to imagine himself on the point of catching and punishing the insolent creature

who had dared to attack him on his own threshold.

In leading his enemy toward the forest, no doubt the fox had some sinister purpose in view, but in this instance he failed to develop it. As the dog ran on, his anger gradually cooled down. As he found himself, after fifteen minutes or so of very tiresome effort, apparently no nearer to overtaking the brush-tailed fugitive, he remembered things he wanted to do at home. There was a bone to dig up, and another one to bury. After all, he had, as yet, no deep grudge against this fox, whom it had not occurred to him to associate with that hurried little affair at the burrow on the uplands.

As for a bite, *that* was no indelible insult. His pace slackened. The fugitive tried to feign lameness, but it had no effect. All at once the dog stopped short, smelled carefully at a bush, as if finding some delightfully interesting scent upon it, then turned his back and coolly trotted off homewards. The fox stared at him irresolutely for a few moments, and then, apparently deciding to postpone his vengeance or think out a more

effective plan for it, took his own way, along the skirts of the wood, to his den in the uplands.

Having the whole care of the motherless litter on his shoulders, in spite of the burning urgency of his hate the fox had no time, during the next few days, to journey to the farm and seek the dog again. At last, the youngsters having been removed to another and more secluded burrow, and left with a whole rabbit to tear at in his absence, he went, late one night, to find his adversary. He found everything quiet at the farm, asleep under the soft spring moonlight; but the dog was absent, probably chasing rabbits in the pasture fields. With bitter contempt, the fox defiled his enemy's kennel and his food-dish, together with several buried bones which he dug up and scattered. Then, leaving the hen-roost and the duck-pen untouched, lest he should draw down upon himself the dangerous attention of the farmer, he trotted away, confident that his enemy would understand the enormity of the insults thus heaped upon him.

In this confidence he was not astray. The dog, returning tired and dew-drenched in

the grey of the dawn, flew into a paroxysm of rage. His keen scent told him that his insulter was the same hardy animal who had so recently attacked him on his threshold, and then led him so futile a chase. And he began to realize that there was some more than ordinary grudge behind these virulent demonstrations. His anger burned itself down to a steady, dangerous glow; and, after sniffing out all his enemy's performances till the situation was pretty clear to him, he picked up the trail and started resolutely in pursuit. The feud was now fairly and reciprocally on, and he was no longer in a temper to be diverted from his purpose. He, too, was set on vengeance.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the farmstead the fox's trail was nearly an hour old, but before long it grew fresher. Hoping to be followed, the fox had lingered by the way, catching a few belated mice, and beetles yet torpid with the morning chill, and a brooding ground-sparrow asleep upon her eggs. At last, looking back from the top of a little knoll, he saw his pursuer labouring doggedly along his trail. He waited motionless till the dog caught sight

of him and gave tongue savagely. Then he ran on, keeping a lead of less than a hundred feet.

At first, it looked as if the crafty fugitive's object was merely to wear out his heavy pursuer, and so diminish the odds of weight and muscle against him. For well over an hour he led the chase hither and thither over the roughest and most difficult ground, where his lightness and his knowledge of the faint trails enabled him to spare himself to the utmost. But he seemed at the point of exhaustion; he looked as if he were being slowly but surely overtaken. His pursuer, panting heavily, and with streaming tongue far out, was hardly more than a dozen yards behind.

At length the fugitive, as if pressed beyond endurance and about to seek retreat in some hole in the rocks, turned and ran straight, in what seemed to be a last, frantic burst of speed, up a naked slope, the crest of a little rocky ridge. Reaching the crest, he vanished over it without a pause. The dog came racing up, but instead of following on over, as the fox had evidently expected him to do, he checked himself abruptly before reaching

the brink, and went and peered down with a prudence which showed that he was not so easily to be entrapped.

The other side of the ridge was a perpendicular drop of some forty or fifty feet into a raging torrent.

Had he not stopped himself when he did, he would have inevitably plunged over headlong, and the affair would have been settled conclusively. But, fortunately for him, he knew the place. It did not occur to him, even, that his enemy could have expected him to fall over. He merely thought that the fox had a hiding-place in the crevices under the brink, and what concerned him was to find that hiding-place.

Presently he made out the merest shadow of a ledge descending for a few feet and vanishing under a jutting overhang. The scent of the fugitive was strong on this slender and perilous track. Only a creature of marvellous sure-footedness and lightness could have taken it securely. For the dog it was utterly impossible. He sniffed at it with disgust, and then, realizing that the brink itself was showing a tendency to crumble under his weight, he drew back, sat down

on his haunches, lifted his muzzle toward the sky, and howled his wrathful discomfiture. In the middle of this outburst he chanced to turn his head. There, on the very edge of the steep, not twenty paces distant, sat the fox, eyeing him from narrowed lids, inscrutably.

The dog felt all at once that he was being mocked. It was a new and humiliating experience to him. Almost blind with rage, he darted once more in pursuit.

This time the fox ran off in a new direction, up a long, broken slope traversed by bare ledges. The chase led at length through a shallow cleft, which narrowed gradually till the rocks met overhead, forming a flat arched tunnel perhaps a foot and a half in height. Here, along the dry fissures, protected alike from the rain and from the attacks of the honey-loving bears, a runaway swarm of bees had established itself and multiplied to an enormous colony. At this hour of the morning the bees were just beginning to stir themsleves and get ready for the day's work in the sun, gathering the perfumed spring pollen.

The fox knew well this perilous passage,

having surveyed it shrewdly from the sides, though, of course, he had never ventured to pass through it. Now he lingered, as if cornered, till the dog was within a dozen yards of him. Then, putting on a tremendous burst of speed, he dashed through the tunnel, elongating himself till he was flat to earth, but managing to flick the swarming combs with his brush as he sped beneath them. With no worse punishment than two or three stings and a few bees clinging in his fur, he passed safely through, and dashed into a dense mass of bushes to scrape off his assailants. But he left the bees thoroughly aroused, and buzzing with anger.

Into this scorching vortex of live flame the dog plunged blindly. In a second he realized the situation. Yelping with the sudden torture, he backed out, covered with bees from head to foot, and went leaping convulsively down the slope, the air black and humming behind him.

By sheer good luck — for he did not see at all where he was going — he crashed through a fringe of scrub and fell into a deep, icy pool. The relief was instantaneous, and the shock brought back his wits. The bees

which clung to him were drowned out, washed off, and chilled to instant harmlessness. When he came to the surface, certain members of the following hosts pounced down at him, but, for the most part, the furious insects could not make out how he had vanished. They hung humming over the bushes and over the pool, but they seemed apprehensive about descending too close to the sunken surface of the water, repelled, no doubt, by the darkness and the chill. The dog thrust his head under a thick tuft of wet weeds, where it was well protected, and waited there for the insects to get tired of looking for him. By the time this arrived, he was half dead with cold; but, dragging himself out cautiously and slinking away under the thickets, he gained a place where he could lie and warm himself in the sun. Then, with eyes and nostrils swollen and burning, and his whole hide smarting with the poison that had been pumped into it in that awful half minute, he made his way dejectedly homeward.

Now, though the dog was very far from guessing that his astute antagonist had deliberately led him into the citadel of the

bees, his rage, nevertheless, burned with sevenfold heat because of that agonizing discomfiture. The next time the fox came to the farm to taunt him, he took up the pursuit with such a fiery vigour that the fugitive was for a while somewhat put to it to keep ahead. This time the chase led away in quite another direction, down the valley towards the dark tamarack swamps which the dog had never been tempted to explore.

There was now no playing on the part of the fox. Disappointed in his former schemes for vengeance, and almost daunted at last by the deadly pertinacity of his foe, he was beginning to grow uneasy, and to want the affair off his shoulders. While the dog's rage was growing daily, his own craving for vengeance was beginning to cool as his grief for his slain mate moderated. Life was full of interest, and he wanted to think of other things than this feud. He was none the less resolved, however, that his enemy should be punished. So to-day he ran straight to his purpose, with the grim pursuer close on his heels.

In a secret place in the swamp, some

twenty-four hours earlier, a bear cub had been born. The place was hard to come at, over narrow causeways of twisted roots and fallen, slippery trunks, but, when reached, it was little more than a shallow recess under a boulder, with a big cedar slanting in front of it. The mother bear lay here on a bed of dry moss, nursing her baby, and from time to time glaring jealously about the sombre shades as if she expected something to come and try to snatch the little one from her embrace.

At the moment when the fox appeared, running noiselessly, the bear was not looking. Her great black head was bent down while she licked and snuggled the cub. A ruddy shape touched the moss close beside her, and was gone even before she could lift her head, leaving a taint on the heavy air. In a blaze of anger and alarm, she thrust the whimpering little one behind her and sat up on her haunches just as the dog, with a startled yelp, brought up sharply within two feet of her. He had barely saved himself from jumping square on top of her.

With all his courage and his craving for a fight, the dog had no wish to tackle a mother

bear suckling her cub. He sprang aside, striving to retreat the way he came. But the bear, hurling her massive bulk forward with amazing agility, had instantly cut off that retreat. Doubling on himself, he leaped for another prostrate trunk which offered a way over the ooze-pit. He gained it, but it was slippery with ancient slime, and he missed his foothold, his hindquarters dropping back into the black mud. Shrinking small and hunching his back desperately, he clawed at the hard trunk and strove to draw himself clear of the impending doom. But even as he strove, with open mouth and protruding tongue and frightened, staring eyes, a great black paw descended upon him, smashing his back. The bull blood in him, asserting itself at this supreme moment, forbade him to cry out, and, writhing himself about, he locked his jaws upon that shattering paw. The next second he was twitched forth upon the moss, and crushed out of all resemblance to a dog. And as the bear, in her mother rage, mauled and tore the lifeless body, the fox, sitting on his haunches some forty feet away, looked on and licked his chaps, content at last with his vengeance.

Red Dandy and MacTavish

THE first of the dawn lay pink and dewy chill along the naked, tilted crest of the Ridge. Slowly it crept down the scarred rocks, washed softly over the tangled thickets, and at last shot its thin, aërial rays of light and colour down the glades and under the branches of the ash, chestnut, and maples, just filming with their earliest spring green.

Into a deep little hollow last it came — a hollow carpeted with dry twigs, half choked with vine and bramble, and overhung by the branches of two enormous chestnuts. It was so secret a hollow that the long, pink fingers of light felt their way in with difficulty, and seemed to grope for a while before finding anything to reveal. At last, however, they did find something, and immediately, as if pleased at the discovery, they lit up the hollow with a sudden flush of pale rose-amber.

What the delicate light revealed was a young fawn, whose immense, mild, liquid eyes met it wonderingly. Curled up under a bush, his red-tawny coat, mottled with cream yellow, made him, as a rule, almost indistinguishable from his bed of mottled brown leaves. But that peculiar, crystalline yet tinted light of earliest dawn made him suddenly conspicuous. After a moment or two of wonder, he seemed to become aware that he was no longer invisible. He dropped his baby head between his hooves, and appeared to shrink into a guarded immobility. It was almost as if by sheer unconscious volition his colours became less bright, and he began to fade, through mere stillness, back into his surroundings.

But that instant's motion, the lowering of his head, had been enough to make trouble. It had caught the attention of a pair of vigilant and cruel eyes at the upper edge of the hollow. A prowling, shadowy-grey shape, as noiseless as the motion of the dawn itself, crouched suddenly flat to earth and glared down with terrible intentness at the ruddy, mottled little form beneath the bush. A second shadowy shape, with similar pale,

piercing, moon-like eyes, stole up and crouched beside the first.

They were sinister-looking beasts, the two lynxes, each nearly forty pounds in weight, with immense, panther-like paws, and muscles like steel moving swiftly under their loose, long fur. Their hindquarters were of exaggerated size and power as compared with the forequarters, and their hind legs were gathered under them, ready for an instant spring, in such a fashion as to suggest some monstrous and predatory hare. Their tails were mere thick stubs, apparently quite futile as far as concerned all customary uses of a tail. Their round, malign faces were fiercely whiskered, surrounded by a sort of ruff of long fur curling forward from beneath the jaws, and their ears were tipped with long, stiff tufts. In colour they were of a light grey, powdered vaguely with a pale yellow-brown — a colouring which made them all but invisible in the shadowed woods, except for the startling brilliancy of their wide pale eyes.

Both lynxes stared unwinkingly for a few long seconds at the unconscious fawn, whose mild eyes were turned in another direction,

watching anxiously for his mother's return. All at once, though not a sound, a whisper, had come to his ears, some subtle warning thrilled his baby nerves, and he turned his head to glance behind him.

Two dim, grey things, with dreadful eyes fixed upon his, were creeping down into the hollow.

The fawn was not many hours old. He had so far learned nothing, either of lynxes or of death. But he needed no learning to know that those two dim shapes meant doom. Opening wide his narrow muzzle, he cried out for his mother — a strange, strident cry, half bleat, half yelp, but quite unmistakable in its terror and its appeal.

The cry was answered instantly by a clear belling from close at hand, and almost in the next second the mother doe arrived, coming in one tremendous leap clean over the nearest bushes. It was not by any means her customary way of coming home. On other occasions she would drift in silently, not so much as snapping a twig. But when danger threatened her little one, she threw prudence to the breezes and came by the shortest road.

With a soft little murmur of reassurance, the red mother nosed her fawn, sniffing it all over as if to ask what ailed it. It was shivering, and after a few moments she looked up, glancing about to see what had so frightened it.

At the sudden, vehement appearance of the doe, both lynxes had stopped abruptly, crouching in readiness for whatever might take place. When they saw the mother's head bent low, and all her attention absorbed in the little one, they again stole forward. But now they separated, one creeping to the right, the other to the left. They knew that a mother deer, in the protection of her young, was an antagonist too formidable for one lynx alone to engage; but, by attacking her on both flanks at once, they trusted to confuse her, and so avoid the lightning strokes of her dangerous, knife-edged hooves.

When the doe lifted her head to look around, she saw the implacable eyes of the male lynx, not fifteen feet away, just gathering himself for the spring. Experienced in battle, she did not wait for that deadly pounce, but, with a shrill snort of defiance, she leaped to meet it, prancing forward with

indescribable lightness, her polished, pointed hooves, hard as steel, striking out savagely before her.

With a snarl, the lynx jumped backwards, not daring to face the strokes. Instinctively the doe glanced behind her, to see that the little one was still safe. The she lynx was in the very motion of springing upon her. She was not in time to evade the spring, but she was in time to meet it ineffectually with one short, cutting stroke. Such a stroke could not stop the great cat's pounce, already launched, but it ripped a long red gash down the grey flank, and so diverted the attack that the assailant's claws were sunk into the shoulders of their prey, instead of into the throat.

With a sharp belling, the doe leaped into the air, striving to shake her assailant off. Finding this effort vain, she darted under a branch, hoping to scrape the fatal rider from her place. In this she was successful; but before she could turn and defend herself again, the male lynx had her by the throat, strangling her. The next moment the female was again upon her shoulders, tearing at her neck and ripping her flank with those eviscer-

ating hinder claws. She belled chokingly, and struggled with desperate, plunging leaps. But in a couple of minutes the lynxes had borne her down, and in a few seconds more her life-blood was flooding forth scarlet and hot upon the withered leaves.

II

MacTavish sat on the very peak of the Ridge, and stared with calm eyes into the spreading miracle of the dawn. In the crook of his left arm rested his handy .303, its blued barrel gleaming in the clean, thin radiance. His big right hand fingered his red beard complacently. That sunrise seemed to him just as it should be. The faint rose tints, the amber, the gold, of a transparency altogether inexplicable and almost unbelievable, played along his rugged but fine-strung nerves like the long, slow notes of a fiddle beside a still water under a midsummer moon.

Scotch, Welsh, and English in his veins, MacTavish was a mixture more or less enigmatic even to himself. He shrank from

hurting anything, yet he was a keen hunter, and he loved a good fight. On his way from his cabin in to the Settlement, twenty miles away across the valley, he had started up the western slope a half-hour earlier than was necessary — quite in the dark, in fact — just in order to see the first of the sunrise from the crest of the Ridge, its celestial flood breaking over the wide valley below him. But he would not acknowledge to himself that this was his reason for coming up so early. He had several other reasons ready, but he knew in his heart that they had no weight at all. They only served to veil to himself this guilty passion of his for sunrises and sunsets, and other beautiful but practically useless affairs.

Never, thought MacTavish, tugging at his red beard with slow intensity of enjoyment, had he seen that great view from the Ridge more entrancing, never a sunrise that was more perfect in its sorcery. He hardly dared to breathe, lest it should change in a flash to some other and less lovely combination of tones. The stillness was almost terrible in its perfection — as it were of an infinite bubble blown to its utmost limit and colouring by a miracle.

And then it broke. From the hollow below came a medley of furious sounds — snarls, cries, strugglings — the unmistakable utterance of a life-and-death encounter. The mystic light upon the rocks, the thickets, the greening trees, suddenly changed, became more familiar, more ordinary, something almost in the line of the day's routine return. MacTavish drew a long breath, as of one released from a strong spell. He snatched up his rifle, and darted swiftly but quietly down the slope to the bushy hollow where the sounds seemed to come from.

The faithful mother had ceased struggling, and the lynxes, not yet quite assured of their victory, were both tearing ferociously at her throat when MacTavish appeared. With harsh snarls — enraged beyond all discretion at this interference in the hour of victory — they turned and confronted him, as if almost minded to try conclusions with him. Up went MacTavish's handy gun, and the male lynx sprang straight into the air, with all four legs stretched rigid, to fall back, relaxed and sprawling, across the neck of his victim. Before he was fairly down, the female was gone — simply vanishing, as if the report of

the rifle had blown her away. MacTavish saw no more of her than an instant's drift of grey between one thicket and another.

MacTavish picked up his trophy, appraised it with skilled eye as a good pelt, then flung it down carelessly, a little chagrined at not having been quick enough to secure both the grey marauders. He examined the doe to make sure she was quite dead, produced a few yards of stout cord from his capacious pocket, and strung the body up by the hind legs to a branch overhead, out of the way of the foxes. Then he turned to the fawn.

The little animal had been watching, from its place, with immense blank eyes of stupefaction. So many sudden horrors had left it numb in its utter incomprehension. When MacTavish gently went up to it, holding out his hand, it hardly even shrank away. But when he indiscreetly laid his hand upon its muzzle, the dreaded man-smell shocked it, and it struggled to its feet, repeating that strident and piteous cry of appeal to the mother who was now so deaf to it. Feebly it strove to get away. But MacTavish had it fast. He held it firmly, but he stroked it gently, rubbing its back and its neck. And

presently, puzzled, but in part reassured by the smell of its mother, which blended so curiously with the man-smell on MacTavish's clothes, it stopped its strange cries and lay still in the hunter's arms, looking at him with eyes of anxious inquiry.

"Poor wee beastie!" murmured MacTavish, holding it as tenderly as if it had been a human baby. And then, remembering his beloved Burns: "'Wee sleekit, cowerin', timorous beastie!"

For a few moments he stood hesitating. He had set out to pay a visit to the Settlement, and he was not one to lightly change his plans. But the needs of the little animal were a peremptory demand on his understanding heart. Another day would do for the trip to the Settlement. He slung the dead lynx over his shoulder, settled the fawn more or less comfortably in his left arm, and started back for his cabin, on the other side of the Ridge.

III

IN MacTavish's snug cabin, tended and petted, the fawn speedily forgot the horrors which had surrounded its first appearance

on the stage of life. It learned at once to drink warm cow's milk, and a little later to browse, not only on the grass of MacTavish's pasture-clearing, but also on the choicest vegetable products of his little garden. MacTavish spoiled it shockingly, but it rewarded him with a dog-like devotion that might almost at times have seemed a nuisance. It was for ever at his heels, and as it seemed constitutionally incapable of learning obedience, whenever he did not wish to be followed he had to shut it up securely in the barn, and turn a deaf ear to its terrible penetrating appeals.

In course of months the little one's coat lost its creamy spots and became all a rich, tawny red, shading to pale buff on the under-parts, and he grew up into a particularly handsome and high-stepping young buck. It was then that his name was changed from "Beastie" to "Red Dandy." Gradually now he got to be on fair terms, not friendly, but condescendingly tolerant terms, with the black-and-white cow, the yearling calf, and the two big, sleepy, carrot-coloured oxen who did MacTavish's ploughing and hauling. When his first horns began to sprout,

he gradually established an uncontested supremacy over all these easy-going folk of the farmyard. In spite of his slimness and his small stature, he had them at a complete disadvantage, for he could always prod them where he liked, or buffet them cruelly with his fore-hooves, and then evade their resentment with scornful ease. So, to save themselves trouble, they gave way to his tyranny until it became a habit with them. This domination, no doubt, was rendered easier for him to secure by reason of the terms of favour on which he lived with MacTavish. Spending half his time in the cabin, trotting at MacTavish's heels, or at his side with MacTavish's arm over his back, the other animals easily came to regard him as sharing some small measure of MacTavish's authority. It was perhaps a fortunate thing for all concerned that there was no dog or cat about the place to divide MacTavish's affections, for Red Dandy was as jealous as a Spanish gipsy.

Red Dandy, as he developed into a full-sized, high-antlered buck, developed also two antipathies — towards the pig and towards all snakes. For the first there was

no apparent reason, and, whenever he was caught manifesting it, he got a sharp horse-whipping from MacTavish, which would send him off snorting to sulk for perhaps ten minutes behind the barn. He used to stand beside the pen and thrust at the unoffending grunter through the cracks. To avoid accidents, MacTavish ran the walls of the sty to a discouraging height, and nailed up the cracks between the boards.

When this was done, Red Dandy appeared to forget the existence of pigs. But for snakes he was always hunting, stealing up sunny hillocks in the effort to surprise them basking, or beating the coverts of "snake-brake" with his antlers to frighten them forth into the open, where he might trample them with his sharp and nimble hooves. In this antipathy he had his master's heartfelt co-operation, for, to MacTavish's somewhat childlike eyes, all snakes, the bright, harmless little garter-snakes no less than the deadly moccasin or copper-head, were children of the devil. This seemed to be exactly the point of view of Red Dandy as well. He would pursue a tiny, innocent, pale-green grass-snake, eight or

ten inches long, with the same gay, dancing fury that he devoted to the destruction of a six-foot black-snake or blue-racer. But when it came to either an adder or a copper-head, then he was as cool and wary as a trained fencer. He knew — who shall say how, since MacTavish never taught him? — very well the difference between the snakes whose bite meant death and those which bore no poison-fangs in their jaws.

It happened that the southward slopes of the Ridge, being sheltered from all the harsher winds and full of sun-steeped ledges, were a favourite haunt of the copper-head, which nowhere else managed to maintain itself so far north. From time to time, when some one was bitten, there would be a move among the scattered settlers in both valleys toward a concerted campaign for the extermination of the virulent pests. But, for the most part, the copper-heads kept to the out-of-the-way ledges and inaccessible ravines, and so avoided making themselves conspicuous. They did not court notoriety, and therefore they were apt to be forgotten.

MacTavish, as a rule, never thought of them. But he thought of them abruptly on

the morning when the rocky lip where he was standing to drink in the view suddenly scaled off beneath his weight, and he felt himself falling down the bare, terrific incline. The incline was almost perpendicular, and he fell swiftly, amid a whirl of dusty stones and a bright, hot glow, into the very face of the landscape. He scraped over a narrow ledge, clutched wildly at a bush which grew upon it, and was greeted with a savage hiss which seemed to him just in his ear. His hair rose, and he let go of the bush, and felt for the moment an actual relief in the fact that he kept right on falling. Then his head struck a projecting root, he bounced from a second ledge, lost consciousness, fell more expeditiously, and rolled to the bottom with a broken leg and a pattering company of stones of assorted sizes.

He knew nothing about it, of course, but those almost too attentive stones were his bodyguard, and for the moment an effective one. Hissing and rattling indignantly, a basking family of copper-heads scattered and scurried away, routed by the shower of stony missiles. In a few seconds the dust settled, and the last of the stones lay still. And so

did MacTavish, for he had been well battered in that unceremonious descent, and the knock on his skull had been a shrewd one.

At the time of MacTavish's fall, Red Dandy had been close behind, nosing with fine velvet muzzle at his master's pocket to see if it held anything for him. He jumped back with a snort at MacTavish's amazing disappearance, and drew off resentfully. He was not accustomed to seeing his master behave with such abruptness, or go away without giving him time to follow. For several minutes he stalked back and forth, with head held very high and a puzzled look in his eyes. Then, beginning to get lonely, he went to the brink of the steep and cautiously peered over. His feet displaced some small stones, which went rattling down and struck MacTavish smartly. The buck expected to see him jump up and get angry at this. But instead of that he lay perfectly still.

Red Dandy grew troubled. He went close to the edge, pushed a few more stones down upon MacTavish, and seemed to dally for a moment with the notion of trying to slide down after them himself. No doubt he

would have succeeded in sliding down, but a doubt as to how he would arrive gave him pause. He snorted uneasily, drew back from the brink, stood fretting for a moment or two, and then started along the crest of the Ridge in search of an easier way down.

When all had been quiet for some time at the foot of the steep, several of the copper-heads, shining with a dull glow in the sun, came gliding warily back towards their basking-place. The patriarch of the tribe, a thick-bodied, beautifully-patterned fellow, nearly six feet long, led the way. He came to within a few feet of the unconscious MacTavish, gave a warning rattle, and coiled himself to strike. His followers withdrew with petulant hissings, cheerfully leaving all the glory to him.

As MacTavish did not move, the snake did not strike. He waited, the picture of readiness, his flat, opaque eyes fixed on the mysterious object which had arrived so mysteriously among them. He waited for possibly ten minutes. Then, satisfied that the object was not alive, and not dangerous, he uncoiled and started to wriggle away.

At this moment MacTavish partially

came to. He moved an arm. He tried to move his right leg. A groan came from his throat. The great snake recoiled himself in a flash, and rattled his loud warning like the gentlemanly fighter that he was.

At that ominous sound, MacTavish came to completely, with all his wits about him. He did not move a muscle, except to open his eyes slowly and peer about him. He did not have to peer about much, for there was the great copper-head straight in front of his face, with head gently swaying, within range and ready to strike.

MacTavish thought hard. He knew that his enemy would not strike so long as he kept perfectly still. But he knew also that the snake now knew he was alive, and therefore might wait rather indefinitely. How long would he be able to keep still? His broken leg was beginning to torture him savagely. Other snakes would presently come out of their hidings. How would he ever be able to drag himself away without bringing them upon him. The cold sweat jumped out all over his body. Then he felt his head swim again, and his wits again beginning to slip away. In an icy terror, he

clutched them back to their duty, horrified lest he should move in his unconsciousness. But, weak as he was, he began to contemplate futile schemes, such as clutching up a handful of stones and pelting the enemy away, though he knew very well that the enemy could strike at least three or four times as fast as he could move his arm.

The agony and suspense and confusion in his head were beginning to overcome him once more, when he caught a sound of light hooves behind him. He dared not turn his head to look, but he felt who it was, and his brain cleared again. He saw the coiled snake shift his head so as to give another focus to the curve of its swing.

A moment more, and Red Dandy came mincing into view, dancing that delicate war-dance with which he was wont to challenge the unresponsive pig. He swerved off to one side, drawing the copper-head's attention away from MacTavish. Then he warily presented the tips of his antlers, just within reach. The snake struck like lightning twice, spilling his venom harmlessly over the impenetrable horn. Teased by that exasperating antler, he struck again

and again, till at last not a drop more venom came. Then, realizing suddenly that his fighting powers were gone till he could secure them time to recuperate, he swiftly uncoiled and darted for shelter.

But, quick as he was, the buck was too quick for him. A keen-edged hoof, slicing downwards with vindictive force, struck him on the back of the neck just where it ran into the skull. That stroke severed the tough scales and shore the vertebral column clean through.

The deadly head dropped forward, utterly powerless, but the body, packed with vitality and force, writhed itself up in hideous, lashing coils. With one more stroke, Red Dandy smashed the impotent head. Then he stamped and trampled down the writhing coils, till they were chopped into bits, and his trim fetlocks streamed with blood. Not while there was anything left to writhe, would he give up his performance or accept his victory as complete.

MacTavish, feeling quite safe now as far as snakes were concerned, let himself go for a little. When he came to again, he felt better, and Red Dandy was standing beside

him, sniffing at his face. He fondled the narrow, soft muzzle for a minute or two, expressing his unqualified admiration for his rescuer's courage and craft; and then, setting his teeth grimly, he started on the slow and agonizing crawl down to the nearest farmstead.

Printed in the United States of America.

RETURN TO ⟶ **BIOSCIENCE & NATURAL RESOURCES LIBRARY**
2101 VALLEY LIFE SCIENCES BLDG. 642-2531

LOAN PERIOD 1	2	3
4 **ONE**	**MONTH**	6 **LOAN**

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

LIBRARY USE		
APR 0 6 1998		
REC'D BIOS		
APR 06 '98 -2 00 PM		

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720

FORM NO. DD0, 50m, 11/94

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C055451506